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COLLEGE OF ISLAMIC STUDIES

CELEBRATING THE BIRTH OF THE PROPHET IN BRITISH INDIA: A STUDY OF AḤMAD RAŻĀ KHĀN BARELWĪ'S WRITINGS ON THE *MAWLID*

BY

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ABSTRACT

In 19th century British India, the celebration of the birth of the Prophet or *mawlid* became a contested ritual amongst the Muslim scholars. One such scholar Aḥmad Rażā Khān, founder of the Barelwī movement and a Sufi shaykh of the Qādiriyya fraternity, advocated strongly for its permissibility. It was his understanding of the ritual that ultimately became a core differentiating factor between more than 200 million adherents of the Barelwī movement and the rest of the Muslims in the Indian subcontinent.

Accordingly, this thesis examines the manner in which the *mawlid* (popularly known as *mīlād* in the Indian subcontinent) was conducted in 19th/20th century British India, including the type of practices undertaken as part of it, and the key debates amongst the scholars (ʿulamāʾ) at that time regarding the ritual. Situating Aḥmad Rażā's views in the context of these debates, and in the backdrop of the political and communal environment of the time, the thesis examines his thought on the legal status of the *mawlid* celebration and associated practices (such as the *qiyām*), and their significance for him. It also explores how he positioned his views within the broader Islamic tradition.

Specifically, in addition to permissibility of the ritual and associated practices, the research focused on: conditions for the organizers of the ritual and for the person reciting the *mawlid*, involvement of Hindus, normative status of food consumption and the ontological presence of the Prophet at the ritual. Although Sajjad (2018) has reviewed certain *mawlid* fatwas from Aḥmad Rażā in the context of Barelwī-Deobandī polemics, this paper bases its conclusions on a detailed qualitative and to a certain extent, quantitative analysis of his complete *mawlid* fatwas and treatises.

His fatwas, treatises and related juristic publications have recently been gathered into a 30-volume compendium published from Pakistan. This version of the *Fatāwā Riḍwiyya* is the main source of the study whose results have been presented here.

DEDICATION

This work is wholly and solely dedicated to my wife Hira. Working and pursuing graduate studies full-time was always going to be a challenge. It was through her unceasing support over the past 18 months, where not only did she sacrifice our 'we' time but took over 'daddy duties' as well, that I was able to complete my degree and deliver this work. As cliched (and perhaps a tad bit patriarchal!) as it may sound; behind every successful man, indeed is a woman.

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Last but by no means least, I would like to thank Dr. Sanyal for agreeing to be my external examiner. For the past year or so, I think I have spent more time with her works on Aḥmad Rażā than my wife! And so, when she accepted the role of the external examiner, I felt like a kid in a candy store, eagerly awaiting her valuable feedback on my study of the Scholar's works.

NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

The transliteration style for Arabic and Persian is in accordance with the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (IJMES). Commonly found words in the *Merriam-Webster* dictionary and on the *IJMES Words List* have not been transliterated.

For Urdu, the transliteration style adopted is in accordance with the *Islamic Studies* journal published by the Islamic Research Institute of the International Islamic University in Islamabad, Pakistan. A vast amount of vocabulary used in the Urdu language is based on Arabic and Persian words. Accordingly, wherever words originating from Arabic and Persian languages are being used in an Urdu context, the Urdu transliteration style is adopted. Exceptions are titles of Urdu works, where authors have deliberately adopted Arabic or Persian titles, and thus the style used in these instances is in accordance with IJMES.

Furthermore, I have deliberately used the Urdu transliteration style for the ‘Riḍā’ in Aḥmad Razā Khān, in recognition of the fact that in South Asia he is more widely known and recognized through the Urdu pronunciation of his middle name.

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INTRODUCTION

> The melodies of happiness were played then,
> And cheerful songs were sung for all.
> Everywhere there was the sound of *Ṣallī ʿAlā* [*ṣalawāt*],
> Today the Beloved of God has been born.
> And then Gabriel himself also announced:
> "This is the Messenger of God!" *Allah hī Allah*!
> Celebrate the arrival of the Messenger - *Allah hī Allah*!
> Lady Āminah's flower - *Allah hī Allah*![1]

This research examines the ritual of *mawlid* or celebration of the birth of the Prophet, and its manifestation in 19th/20th century British India. In Muslim lands, the *mawlid* has been organized and practiced at a government level since the early 11th century,[2] while at an individual level prior to this.[3] It is interesting to note that not only did the ritual expand to other regions and territories, its characteristics also changed due to ethnic, cultural, political and other religious influences. However, in 19th century British India, the *mawlid* became a contested ritual amongst the Muslim scholars. These debates were not just restricted to *bidʿa* versus permissibility of the ritual but also focused on 'correct performance' against what were viewed as 'un-Islamic' practices by certain ʿulamāʾ. One scholar involved in this debate is Aḥmad Rażā Khān who is at the center of this study. As the founder of the Barelwī movement, his understanding of the ritual ultimately became a core differentiating

[1] This is an excerpt from a popular Urdu *mawlid* poem recited frequently in gatherings of the birth celebrations of the Prophet in the Indian subcontinent and other parts of the world. The original author of the work is not known; however, the poem has almost acquired a folk song status. For the complete lyrics and translation, see: "Jashne Amade Rasul," MuslimHymns.com – Sacred Songs & Poetry of Islam, accessed March 25, 2020, http://muslimhymns.com/jashne-amade-rasul/.
[2] N. J. G. Kaptein, *Muhammad's Birthday festival: Early History in the Central Muslim Lands and Development in the Muslim West Until the 10th/16th Century* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1993), 29.
[3] Marion Holmes Katz, *The Birth of the Prophet Muhammad: Devotional Piety in Sunni Islam* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), 208.

factor between more than 200 million adherents of the Barelwī movement and the rest of the Muslims in the Indian subcontinent.[4]

This thesis examines Aḥmad Rażā's view of the *mawlid,* specifically with regards to two broadly defined set of questions First, how does he define the correct modalities of performing this ritual and which practices does he reject. Second, what is the significance of this ritual for him in relation to his understanding of Prophetology? In addition to providing a brief biographical sketch of Aḥmad Rażā's life, chapter one presents the historical and cultural context for the ritual in his time. This also provides the background to the discussion of the key debates surrounding the ritual. In chapter two, based on an analysis of his writings, I reconstruct and present certain dimensions of these debates and outline Aḥmad Rażā's normative definition of the *mawlid*. Furthermore, in parallel with the analysis of normative debates about the *mawlid* in colonial India, in chapter three I also examine Aḥmad Rażā's 'meaning-making' approach towards the *mawlid*, particularly in regard to Prophetology, and his position in the Islamic tradition. As a result of the above, it is expected that an accurate representation can be made of what the British Indian version of the *mawlid* meant for the scholar.

Literature Review

Academic research relating to the ritual of the *mawlid* has mostly been anthropological in nature, wherein researchers have undertaken fieldwork to perform ethnographic research. This category of texts was generally not considered significant for the research undertaken due to the nature of the studies and being regional specific. However, key texts other than ethnographic works were reviewed and relied upon for achieving the research objectives mentioned in the previous section. Since it

[4] *The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions*, ed. John Bowker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 127.

is not possible to discuss all of these texts in this section due to time and length constraints; therefore, in this section I present a review of the most important texts for my research. The literature applicable to the research can be categorized as follows:

- Literature focused on the historical aspects of the ritual, which identifies its origin and development.
- Texts relating to the *mawlid* debates and other scholarly trends in 19th/20th century British India.
- Works pertaining to Aḥmad Rażā, including primary texts from him and secondary literature on him.

Historical Literature

Historical literature relating to the development of the *mawlid* ritual, and associated practices not only provided information on how it was practiced in 19th/20th century British India, but also allowed it to be placed within the broader Islamic civilization. In tracing the early history of the ritual, Kaptein (1993)[5] attempts to identify the origins of the festival through a review of primary texts (both manuscripts and published works) on the *mawlid* from the 12th to the 16th centuries, historical accounts and fatwas. His research method is mainly a review of Islamicist and Islamic texts in Arabic, English, French, German and Spanish. Kaptein identifies the *mawlid* to be a Shiʿa festival that came into existence in the 11th century under Fatimid rule in Egypt. Although he is inconclusive as to how the *mawlid* ended up in the Sunni world, nevertheless he does conclude that it spread rapidly as a state level celebration by the

[5] N. J. G. Kaptein, *Muhammad's Birthday festival: Early History in the Central Muslim Lands and Development in the Muslim West Until the 10th/16th Century* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1993).

early 13th century.[6] He also mentions that its permissibility was disputed as early as the 13th century.[7]

Following on from Kaptein, Katz (2007) in her text on the *mawlid*,[8] takes up conclusions by other academics (such as Kaptein, 1993, pp. 41-43) that the *mawlid* in the Sunni world originated from the Fatimid dynasty, and attempts to explore other aspects of the *mawlid* (for instance personal household events, narrating the Prophet's life) which are inconsistent with the way the *mawlid* took place under the Fatimid dynasty.[9] Katz undertakes a study of primary texts specifically relating to the *mawlid* by various scholars from the 11th to the 20th centuries. These texts are more than what Kaptein has engaged with and can be sub-categorized as fatwas regarding the *mawlid*, polemical works on it and traditional *mawlid* texts narrating the birth and miraculous events of the life of the Prophet. She mainly engages with texts in Arabic and English. Her conclusion is that the origin of the *mawlid* cannot be traced back to a single source or authority. Her view is that this was a gradual process that evolved through various influences into the ritual prevalent in medieval times.[10] Since, Katz's book is more recent and given that her conclusions have not been challenged to date, this was a key survey text on the beginnings of the *mawlid* and its transformation across Muslim lands.

Specifically focusing on poetry, imagery and mysticism, Schimmel (1985) in her text *And Muhammed Is His Messenger*,[11] examines the reverence and respect Muslims accord to the Prophet and how this is perceived as a characteristic of

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[6] Kaptein, 41-42.
[7] Kaptein, 74.
[8] Marion Holmes Katz, *The Birth of the Prophet Muhammad: Devotional Piety in Sunni Islam* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007).
[9] Katz, 3.
[10] Katz, 208.
[11] Annemarie Schimmel, *And Muhammed Is His Messenger: The Veneration of the Prophet in Islamic Piety* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1985).

devotion amongst them. She traces the history of this veneration of the Prophet and its understanding amongst Muslims. She has performed her study through primary field research in Muslim majority countries and an analysis of primary and secondary texts. Schimmel identifies that this aspect of veneration of the Prophet in Islam is similar to other religions, especially Christianity. She also observes that the image of the Prophet was misunderstood and in certain cases distorted by Western and Oriental scholarship.[12]

Debates and Other Reform Movements[13]

Under this category, the texts explored relate to other key scholarly reform movements of the 19th/20th century British India and also the associated intra-faith debates. Such texts assisted in analyzing the *mawlid* debates taking place in Aḥmad Rażā's time and compare and contrast these to his opinions. Much work has been undertaken on the Deobandī movement and so the bulk of the sources related to this area.

Metcalf's (1982) work on the Deobandī reformist movement in British India[14] identifies the origins of the movement, its history, social context and interaction with other movements, such as Barelwī, Ahl-i Ḥadīth, Nadwat al-ʿUlāma and the one in Aligarh, founded by Syed Ahmad Khan (d. 1898). It also presents a background of the founders of the Dār al-ʿUlūm Deoband. Metcalf's approach is based on a review of texts, both primary and secondary. She has engaged with a substantial number of polemical and apologetics type Urdu texts covering the Deobandī movement and accordingly chapter seven dealing with their interaction with the Barelwīs presents a

[12] Schimmel, 3-7.
[13] While I was writing up chapter three of my thesis, Tareen's book *Defending Muḥammad in Modernity* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2020) was published, which deals with Deobandī-Barelwī polemics. Unfortunately, due to time constraints I was not able to take this work into consideration.
[14] Barbara Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860–1900*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982).

pro-Deobandī stance. She has also used government records and official Dār al-ʿUlūm Deoband reports in her research.

A more recent work on the Deoband movement is by Ingram (2018),[15] who presents how the Deobandīs expressed their reformist program in British India and how this was applied specifically in the context of South Africa, which according to him is home to the most significant Deobandī presence outside of South Asia. His main conclusions are: Sufism is no longer central in the thought of the movement as it was for its founders, contemporary scholars are preferring to quote the Qur'an and hadith in discourse as opposed to Ḥanafī scholarship, and the 'dynamism' and 'internal complexity' of the movement where it has adapted to local needs and pressures.[16] He basis his thesis on primary and secondary texts (mainly articles and books) in English, Urdu and Arabic.

Both the above texts on the Deoband movement provide an analysis on the various debates that occurred between the Deobandīs and Barelwīs. However, a key text specifically addressing the *mawlid* debate of the time is by Sajjad (2018)[17] who analyzes the Deobandī-Barelwī polemics in Pakistan. In it, he has a specific chapter where he presents a history of the *mawlid* debate starting from Aḥmad Rażā to contemporary times. This again is based on a review of primary and secondary texts from the two movements and also other sources such as social media and interviews with scholars from the movements. However, Sajjad's focus is broadly defined as he attempts to identify trends, themes and conclusions based on a number of sources (fatwas, texts, speeches, etc.) from different individuals over a period of time as

[15] Brannon D. Ingram, *Revival from Below: The Deoband movement and global Islam* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2018).
[16] Ingram, 207-17.
[17] Mohammad Waqas Sajjad, "For the Love of the Prophet: Deobandi-Barelvi Polemics and the Ulama in Pakistan", Phd. diss., University of California, Berkley, 2018, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

opposed to this research where a more detailed analysis was undertaken of the individual *mawlid* fatwas of Aḥmad Rażā from the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Aḥmad Rażā Khān

Sanyal's works on Aḥmad Rażā provides a biographical account of the scholar and also analysis of his works and thought. Sanyal's first book on the Barelwī movement,[18] presents the historical context and evolution of not only the movement but also its founder (or 'central figure' as she calls him). She adopts a phenomenological approach towards her research whereby she has engaged with primary texts of the Barelwī movement in Urdu and also interviewed various contemporary scholars of the movement during her fieldwork in Pakistan and India. Her main conclusion is that on the surface the Barelwī movement might have appeared to be apolitical, however, its strong focus on devotional piety and rituals had political implications, especially post 1920.[19]

Her more recent work[20] not only presents a concise overview of the life and works of Aḥmad Rażā but also includes additional content on him. Using sources in Urdu, Arabic and English, Sanyal identifies Aḥmad Rażā's epistemology and unique reformist approach, specifically in the context of British India and in confrontation with other reformist movements of the time, such as the Dār al-ʿUlūm Deoband and Ahl-i Ḥadīth.

Sources and Methods

In addition to the secondary literature on Aḥmad Rażā from Sanyal, this research also engaged with his primary texts, specifically the *Fatāwā Riḍwiyya*, which

[18] Usha Sanyal, *Devotional Islam and Politics in British India: Ahmad Riza Khan Barelwi and His Movement, 1870–1920* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996).
[19] Sanyal, 297, 300.
[20] Usha Sanyal, *Ahmad Riza Khan Barelwi: In the Path of the Prophet* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2005).

is a collection of fatwas issued by him over his lifetime. The version of his *Fatāwā* that was used is the latest one published by the Rażā Foundation from Pakistan, and includes his fatwas, treatises and related juristic type publications in one collection.[21] Although the fatwas are categorized into sections, the ones pertaining to the *mawlid* and practices associated with it, can be found in multiple sections. This would have posed a challenge, since reviewing more than 21,000 pages of fatwas would have required considerable time and effort. However, the complete 30 volume work is available online with search and copying functionalities that made it easier to identify specific *mawlid* related fatwas. [22]

Thus, through a simplified qualitative content analysis, a comprehensive search of his works was performed and the following texts were identified in order of those containing the most material on the *mawlid*:

- *Fatāwā Riḍwiyya*
- *Malfūẓāt-i Aʿlā Ḥażrat*[23] (his sayings collected and compiled by his son)
- *Ḥadāʾiq-i Bakhshish*[24] (collection of poems on the Prophet and Sufi saints)
- *Kanz al-Imān*[25] (a translation of the Qur'an in Urdu)

As a result of this, a total of 116 fatwas relevant to the *mawlid* were identified in his *Fatāwā*. At the second stage, his *Fatāwā* were examined using a simplified analytical frame which related to:

- Date
- Title (if any)
- Question

[21] Although the first volume of this collection was published in 1994, the 30th and final volume came out in 2005, see: Aḥmad Rażā Khān, *Fatāwā Riḍwiyya* (Lahore: Rażā Foundation, 1994-2005).
[22] For an example of this for volume 1, see: https://www.dawateislami.net/bookslibrary/1445/page/1.
[23] Muḥammad Muṣṭafā Rażā Khān, *Malfūẓāt-i ʿAlā Ḥażrat* (Karachi: Maktabah al- Madīnah, 2014).
[24] Aḥmad Rażā Khān, *Ḥadāʾiq-i Bakhshish* (Karachi: Maktabah al- Madīnah, 2012).
[25] Aḥmad Rażā Khān and Sayyid Murādābādī, *Kanz al-Imān maʿ Tafsīr Khazāʾin al-ʿIrfān* (N.p: Maktabah al- Madīnah, 2013).

- Answer
- Sources quoted in the response
- Keywords to thematically cluster the fatwas

Thus, through a close reading of the individual *mawlid* fatwas, and by then situating these in the context of his broader thought attained from his other works, I was able to present a more wholesome picture of his views regarding the ritual in 19th/20th century British India.

CHAPTER 1 – TIME, PLACE AND PERSON: AḤMAD RAŻĀ KHĀN IN 19TH CENTURY BRITISH INDIA

1.1 Introduction[26]

Aḥmad Rażā Khān was born in 1856 in the town of Bareilly in central India to a family of scholars and Sufis. His basic religious education such as reading the Qurʾan, was at the hands of his grandfather and father, who also trained him in issuing religious edicts or fatwas. By the age of 14 he was already a mufti[27] and engaging in scholarly discussions with his contemporaries. At the age of 21, he became a disciple of Shāh Āl-i Rasūl Barkātī (d. 1879), who was not only a Sufi master (shaykh) in the Qādiriyya[28] fraternity but also a descendant of the Prophet and thus revered in Sufi circles. Although, Shāh Āl-i Rasūl passed away after a few years of this event, Aḥmad Rażā's relationship continued with the family through Shāh Āl-i Rasūl's grandson Nūrī Miyān (d. 1906), and he was also bestowed with viceregency (the *khirqa* or *khilāfah*) in the Qādiriyya fraternity. Thus, in 1878 when he went for the greater pilgrimage (ḥajj) to Mecca and Medina, he was already a well-known scholar and mufti in central India. His first ḥajj, was not only a spiritual journey, where it is claimed that he had a vision of the Prophet but was also a scholarly one where he obtained *sanads* (permission to teach and transmit Islamic texts) from the scholars (ʿulamāʾ) of the Hijaz. This further enhanced his credentials as an Islamic scholar and

[26] This biographical account is based on: Usha Sanyal, s.v. "Aḥmad Razā Khān Barelwī", in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ed. Kate Fleet, et al., accessed October 12, 2019, http://dx.doi.org.eres.qnl.qa/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_0015; Sanyal, *Devotional Islam and Politics in British India*; Sanyal, *Ahmad Riza Khan Barelwi*.

[27] Someone who is authorized to issue fatwas.

[28] For the Qādiriyya see : D.S. Margoliouth, s.v. "Ḳādiriyya," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ed. P. Bearman, et al., accessed October 12, 2019, http://dx.doi.org.eres.qnl.qa/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0411.

developed his relationship with the ʿulamāʾ of the holy cities of Mecca and Medina (*Ḥaramayn*).

Being a recognized scholar and specifically a mufti, he was required to respond to petitions in the form of written fatwas on a regular basis. These fatwas were ultimately compiled into one corpus after his death called the *Fatāwā Riḍwiyya*. In addition to this, he also translated the Qur'an into Urdu (titled: *Kanz al-Īmān*) and wrote poetry in praise of the Prophet and Sufi saints which was collected into one anthology called *Ḥadāʾiq-i Bakhshish*. However, the bulk of his written work relates to fatwas and juristic treatises. It was during his second ḥajj that he issued his decisive fatwa declaring specifically certain Indian scholars guilty of disbelief (*kufr*), which was also validated and supported by 33 ʿulamāʾ from the Hijaz.

Aḥmad Ražā is credited with forming the Ahl-i Sunnat wa-l-Jamāʿat (as referred to by its followers) or the Barelwī movement.[29] He never formally established a separate school of thought or movement, and it was only in time that his adherents and followers evolved into one group; primarily in conflict with their main opponents - the Deobandīs. This was mainly due to the reformist[30] movements picking up in India during that time, such as in Aligarh, Deoband and Dār al-Nadwa, and thus the Barelwīs became a fluid and loose movement as a reaction to and in conflict to these. During his lifetime, his followers and ʿulamāʾ aligned to him started referring to him as the *mujaddid* (reviver) of the 14th century of Islam.

Towards the end of his life, his efforts seem to have been focused heavily on resisting the 'Wahhabi' trend in British India, whether it related to any sort of

[29] On the Barelwī movement, see: Usha Sanyal, s.v. "Barelwīs", in *Encyclopaedia of Islam,* ed. Kate Fleet, et al., accessed October 12, 2019. http://dx.doi.org.eres.qnl.qa/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_23995.

[30] I discuss the term further in a later section in this chapter.

interaction with them on political matters, or countering their views and beliefs pertaining to various matters, such as the prohibition of the *mawlid*.[31] As will be highlighted in later chapters, Wahhabism also featured frequently in his later fatwas on the *mawlid*. He passed away in 1921 in his hometown of Bareilly.

This chapter presents the significant political, religious, educational and legal conditions during Aḥmad Rażā's time and the diverse ways these impacted his work. It also discusses in light of these conditions two key aspects of his personality; that is as a scholar and a Sufi shaykh. In addition, this chapter also gives an overview of how the ritual of *mawlid* was performed and practiced in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in British India.

1.2 The Political Situation in British India and its Impact on Aḥmad Rażā

Aḥmad Rażā was born in 1856 in the town of Bareilly in Central India,[32] at a time when the region was on the verge of, if not going through, a tumultuous period. After the unsuccessful revolt of 1857, the British were able to fully colonize India.[33] The region of Rohilkhand, where the town of Bareilly is geographically situated, had been established as an independent kingdom by Afghan Rohillas[34] in 1740 and thus Mughal political influence was already minimal.[35] However, in 1774 this was annexed by the semi-autonomous state of Awadh, wherein the Mughal Emperor was only

[31] For the history and beliefs of the Wahhabi movement, see: Hamid Algar, *Wahhabism: A Critical Essay* (Onenata, New York: Islamic Publications International, 2002); Natana J. DeLong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Michael Crawford, *Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2014).
[32] Sanyal, *Ahmad Riza Khan Barelwi*, 5.
[33] For a detailed account of the events and causes of the revolt of 1857, see: Lawrence James, *Raj: The Making and Unmaking of British India* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 233-298.
[34] Aḥmad Rażā was also of Rohilla descent, see: Sanyal, *Devotional Islam and Politics in British India*, 51.
[35] John Strachey, *Hastings and the Rohilla War* (London: Claredon Press, Oxford University, 1892), 13.

referred to either in the Friday sermon or on coins.[36] Furthermore, the British through the East India Company had provided support to the ruler of Awadh Shujāʿ al-Dawla (d. 1775) to annex Rohilkhand.[37] Moreover, they also facilitated the creation of a princely state called Rampur in the region, under the rule of a Rohilla Faizullah Khan, which remained independent up until 1949.[38] The state of Rampur exercised significant influence in Bareilly since geographically it lay on the outskirts of Bareilly and its rulers were patrons of scholars, artists and intellectuals in the town and the region.[39] By 1801 the East India Company had taken over Rohilkhand and started exercising direct rule there.[40]

During the revolt of 1857, the British were able to minimize the impact of the revolt in the region since the rulers of Rampur had an agreement with them, such that the prince of Rampur chose to side with the British during the revolt, while the British were directly ruling Rohilkhand and indirectly the rest of Awadh.[41] Nevertheless, within a hundred years, Rohilkhand went through multiple rulers: first the Afghan Rohillas, then under Awadh who later ceded it to the East India Company, and ultimately becoming a part of the British Empire in 1858.[42] The result of this political influence of the British was that by the time Aḥmad Rażā was in his teens and issuing fatwas, the Indians generally, and the inhabitants of Bareilly and Rohilkhand specifically, were beginning to view themselves whether willingly or reluctantly, as

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[36] Barbara N. Ramusack, *The New Cambridge History of India*, vol. 3, no. 6: *The Indian Princes and Their States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, 24-25.
[37] Ramusack, 65-66.
[38] Ramusack, 28.
[39] Ramusack, 141-42, 156-57.
[40] E. I. Brodkin, "Proprietary Mutations and the Mutiny in Rohilkhand," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 28, no. 4 (1969), 667.
[41] Ramusack, 105-06.
[42] Ramusack, 84-85.

loyal subjects of the British Empire.[43] In fact Aḥmad Rażā's own family had cordial relations with the British, although they never directly worked for the government.[44]

Furthermore, in 1885 the Indian National Congress was formed, and thus an environment of political activism was in place by the time Aḥmad Rażā had firmly established his credentials as a mufti.[45] Subsequent to this, Indians belonging to various religious denominations were collaborating politically to achieve their overall goal of independence from the British. Although he was close to a period when the Muslim reign in India was overthrown by the British, nevertheless, it was still not possible for him to provide his support to any sort of arrangement with the Hindus against the British, let alone accepting them as rulers. Aḥmad Rażā viewed the Hindus as polytheists and oppressors who interfered in Muslim rituals, as opposed to the British whom he considered Christians and who did not interfere in religious matters of the Muslims, and accordingly any setup that involved Hindus was unacceptable for him.[46] Furthermore, for him the British were people of the book with whom social relations were allowed in Islam.[47] As will be explored in chapter two, this view of interacting with Hindus also impacted his fatwas on their participation in *mawlids*.

The British approach towards governing India was heavily influenced by events in the homeland, such as liberal governments coming to power in 1906,[48] and global happenings such as the unsuccessful Afghan war of 1878 and political and diplomatic confrontation with the Russian Empire (also known as the 'Great Game').[49] From 1906 onwards, there was an increase in demand for democracies in the Muslim world,

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[43] James, Raj, 344-48.
[44] Sanyal, *Devotional Islam and Politics in British India*, 54.
[45] James, *Raj*, 352.
[46] Sanyal, *Devotional Islam and Politics in British India*, 294.
[47] Sanyal, *Ahmad Riza Khan Barelwi*, 109-110.
[48] James, *Raj*, 418.
[49] James, 373-379.

such as Iran, Turkey and Egypt. As a result, there was also a significant push towards a Muslim nationalism[50] in India with the All-India Muslim League being formed in 1906. However, the League was a platform for all Muslims including those Aḥmad Rażā did not consider 'proper' or 'bad' Muslims and with whom any sort of interaction was prohibited.[51] His definition of 'proper' Muslims in the context of the various reform movements taking place in British India at that time, is explored further in section 1.4.

Nevertheless, another key event influencing his thought and efforts was the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in the First World War and the rise of Wahhabi influence in the Middle East. From a shariʿa perspective, Aḥmad Rażā did not consider the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire to be a Caliph since he was not of Quraysh descent, and therefore he (Aḥmad Rażā) was not supportive of the Khilafat movement that was initiated by Indian Muslim leaders in 1919 to protect the office of the Caliphate.[52] This was also one of the reasons why allegations of being pro-British were levelled at him.[53]

1.3 Educational and Legal Changes and Their Impact on Aḥmad Rażā

The introduction of the British system of education in India in the early 19th century, mainly had two impacts. First, it prepared Indians that would be viewed as

[50] As Gilmartin has demonstrated, defining and understanding Muslim nationalism in the context of the Indian subcontinent is complex. It was a combination and interaction of a number of elements including an Islamic vision for the Muslim community, the democratic process (such as voters and alliances) and the legal structure of the modern state; see: David Gilmartin, "A Magnificent Gift: Muslim Nationalism and the Election Process in Colonial Punjab," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 40, no. 3 (1998), 436.
[51] Sanyal, *Devotional Islam and Politics in British India*, 301. As Sanyal mentions, two of Riżā Khān's students and followers, in an apparent break from his stance of non-cooperation with Muslims he did not consider 'proper', were to later become supportive of the Muslim League, see: Sanyal, 326.
[52] Sanyal, *Ahmad Riza Khan Barelwi*, 80-81.
[53] Sanyal, *Devotional Islam and Politics in British India*, 297.

English in perception and intellect.[54] By the time Aḥmad Rażā had established his credentials as a mufti, a new generation of Indian Muslims was in place that had been educated in the British system[55] (case in point, Syed Ahmad Khan[56]) and who viewed themselves as loyal subjects of the British. Aḥmad Rażā disagreed with such Muslims who were influenced by the British in their approach towards matters of religion, and whom, accordingly, he did not consider either proper Muslims or even Muslims at all.[57]

The second impact of the British system of education was that it also influenced ʿulamāʾ in one way or the other, who had started to adapt the model for their own religious educational institutions. Two main examples of this trend from that time are the establishment of the Dār al-ʿUlūm at Deoband, that was funded by private contributions and followed the British bureaucratic style of educational institutions closely;[58] and the school of Nadwat al-ʿUlamāʾ, that was not only supported by the British but also attempted to fuse religious and 'secular' education.[59] Thus, in a way the ʿulamāʾ had initiated a program to reform the traditional Islamic education curriculum offered at their institutions; and the manner in which these institutions were run.[60] However, this reform was not just restricted to these two aspects of the religion; the Indian ʿulamāʾ of the 19th century were also initiating reforms in the areas of beliefs and practices, a topic that is discussed further in the next section.

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[54] Barbara D. Metcalf and Thomas R. Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 82.
[55] James, *Raj*, 344-348.
[56] For details regarding Syed Ahmad Khan see: George Farquhar Irving Graham, *The Life and Work of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1974). For a more recent account see: Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India*, 315-335.
[57] Sanyal, *Ahmad Riza Khan Barelwi*, 108.
[58] Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India,* 93-94.
[59] Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *Custodians of Change: The Ulama in Contemporary Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 69.
[60] Although Aḥmad Rażā is also accredited with establishing a madrasa (religious educational institution) in his hometown, however this appears to have been a traditional one, and one which struggled during its initial years, see: Sanyal, *Ahmad Riza Khan Barelwi*, 112.

Subsequent to the revolt of 1857, the British also got rid of traditional Muslim personal laws, and the related Muslim officers who were responsible for implementing these. An anglicized version of the laws was introduced, which was referred to mostly by non-Muslim judges in ruling over Muslim personal matters. Therefore, in the absence of courts which the ʿulamāʾ would consider legitimate for Muslim matters, the focus turned to establishing alternative mechanisms to fill this perceived void. The main emphasis was upon issuing fatwas so that the Muslim masses could be provided with relevant guidance in the conduct of their religious lives.[61] Furthermore, advancements in infrastructure by the British such as in the railroad and postal systems,[62] and above-all in printing technology, had a favorable impact upon the ʿulamāʾs efficiency of issuing fatwas and its effectiveness.[63] In addition to churning out fatwas the ʿulamāʾ also attempted, albeit with limited success, to establish private Muslim courts.[64]

Aḥmad Rażā's response to the new British courts was an unequivocal one; these had to be completely boycotted.[65] This boycott was not only a form of protest against the British overhaul of the Muslim personal laws, but also because it was that 'no-go' area for Aḥmad Rażā where non-Muslims could infringe upon Muslim religious matters. However, it also impacted Aḥmad Rażā's approach towards Islamic legal matters, wherein he focused on writing fatwas throughout his life. Similar to other ʿulamāʾ of the time, this is an indication of the gap he felt in the community due to absence of state appointed muftis at courts.[66] His fatwa writing is explored further in section 1.5. Moreover, towards the end of his life, he appointed one of his close

[61] Zaman, *Custodians of Change,* 25-26.
[62] Metcalf and Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India*, 97, 99.
[63] Zaman, *Custodians of Change,* 25.
[64] Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India,* 146-47.
[65] Sanyal, *Ahmad Riza Khan Barelwi*, 79.
[66] Sanyal, 67-68.

students Amjad ʿAlī Aʿzamī as the *qāḍī* (Muslim judge) of the Indian nation and two muftis (his son Muṣṭafā Rażā Khān and another close student Burhān al-Haqq) to assist him in his rulings.[67] This indicates his concern for the community, whereby they should have access to an alternative legal mechanism that was not only Islamic but would also be a source of guidance in matters of the shariaʾ. Moreover, this initiative of his also highlights the necessity of the offices of the *qāḍī* and mufti for him.

1.4 Religious Reform Movements in British India and Aḥmad Rażā

1.4.1 *Factors Triggering Religious Reform Movements in the Later 19th Century*

Prior to the revolt of 1857 and the above-mentioned changes taking place in the education and legal domains, there had been reform movements that focused on more intensive action such as taking up arms against the British, migrating from India or boycotting payment of taxes and fees. Followers of such movements generally viewed India under the British as *dār al-ḥarb* (land of war).[68] The domains which had once been under the authority of Muslims were gradually being lost to the British, and thus the legitimacy of the British rule also became a bone of contention amongst the ʿulamāʾ of the time. However, aggressive action by the British against such movements leading up to the unsuccessful revolt of 1857, heavily discouraged later reform movements to follow in their footsteps. These difficult circumstances, whereby British dominion existed in the political, legal and educational domains, and yet Muslims were still allowed to practice their faith, posed a challenge to the ʿulamāʾ of the time. As a result, they chose to focus their efforts instead on areas such as religious education, spiritual development and guidance where chances of

[67] Sanyal, *Devotional Islam and Politics in British India*, 299.
[68] For an overview of some of these movements, e.g. Sayyid Aḥmad Barelwī, Hājī Sharīʿat Allah and others see: Kenneth W. Jones, *The New Cambridge History of India*, vol. 3, no. 1: *Socio-Religious Reform Movements in British India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 18-25, 53-57.

confrontation with the British rulers was minimal.[69] Furthermore, it can be argued that the presence of Wahhabism in Arabia in the 18th and 19th centuries also influenced some of the reform movements, who were encouraged to adopt stricter views as well.[70]

As a result of the above factors, this reform placed an increased emphasis on individual Muslims: striving to ensure their actions and behaviors were in line with the reformers' understanding of Islam, increasing their religious knowledge and understanding of their religion, and viewing the Prophet as a model to be emulated. However, in this process of interpreting and disseminating reformist ideas, a number of areas became disputed, such as Sufism, certain cultural practices, and relations with the British and Hindus. [71]

1.4.2 *Religious Reform Movements in 19th Century British India and Aḥmad Rażā's Response*

In order to situate Aḥmad Rażā in the context of 19th century British India, it is useful as a first step to draw on John Voll's conceptualization of reform trends in Islamic history (1983). According to Voll, there are three main themes found in reform and revival (*iṣlāḥ* and *tajdīd*) movements in Islam: a strict application of the Qurʾan and Sunna; *ijtihād* as opposed to *taqlīd;* and an assertion of the authenticity and uniqueness of the Qurʾanic experience.[72] These themes are also found to be

[69] Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India,* 254.
[70] The influence exerted by the Wahhabi movement on reformist groups is disputed, nevertheless Sanyal considers that it had an impact on certain reformers in the subcontinent; see: *Ahmad Riza Khan Barelwi*, 21-22.
[71] Sanyal, 19-20.
[72] John O. Voll, "Renewal and Reform in Islamic History: *Tajdid* and *Islah*," in *Voices of Resurgent Islam*, ed. John L. Esposito (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 32-35.

prevalent, although in varying degrees, in the reform movements active in Aḥmad Rażā's time. These movements were as follows:[73]

- The Deobandī renewal movement
- The Ahl-i Ḥadīth movement
- The Nadwat al-ʿUlamāʾ movement
- The Aligarh movement under Syed Ahmad Khan
- The Aḥmadī movement

Perhaps the Ahl-i Ḥadīth were the only ones where all three of these themes were present; they were against *taqlīd*, advocated a staunch application of the scriptures and were against any sort of beliefs or practices that had no clear basis in the Qurʾan and 'Sunna'.[74] Aḥmad Rażā considered them to be innovators,[75] and towards the later years of his life; disbelievers.[76] On the other end of the spectrum was the Aḥmadī movement, whose interpretation of the scriptures was at best novel, and was clearly not in favor of any form of *taqlīd,* whereby even the fundamental Muslim belief of the Prophet being 'seal of the Prophets' was open to interpretation.[77] For Aḥmad Rażā, Mirzā Ghulām Aḥmad (d. 1908) and those who viewed him as a Prophet, were all apostates and disbelievers (*kāfirs*).[78] After the Aḥmadī movement, the next group to

[73] The movements listed here are those that were active in a post 1857 British India and during Aḥmad Rażā's life. Accordingly, this is not intended to be an exhaustive list and neither is it the aim of my study to undertake a detailed analysis of all these movements here. My main objective is to demonstrate broadly how in contention with these 'other' movements Aḥmad Rażā defined who was a Muslim, and also a 'proper' one.

[74] For a detailed study of the Ahl-i Ḥadīth movement, see: Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India*, 268-296.

[75] Sanyal, *Devotional Islam and Politics in British India*, 204.

[76] This is discussed further in chapter three.

[77] For an in-depth study of the Aḥmadī movement, see: Yohanan Friedmann, *Prophecy continuous: Aspects of Ahmadi Religious Thought and its Medieval Background* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); for a more recent take, see: Adil Hussain Khan, *From Sufism to Ahmadiyya: A Muslim Minority Movement in South Asia* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2015).

[78] Sanyal, *Devotional Islam and Politics in British India*, 234-235.
Incidentally, Aḥmad Rażā was not alone in these views. Scholars from other movements and denominations such as the Deobandī and Ahl-i Ḥadīth movements staunchly opposed the Aḥmadī

face staunch opposition from Aḥmad Rażā was the Aligarh movement, who although were in favor of the primacy of the Qurʾan, but did not consider hadith to be significant enough.[79] Furthermore, using *ijtihād* they had reinterpreted certain key beliefs of the Muslim community of the time, such as denying miracles of the Prophets and the existence of angels. Again, as expected, and consistent with his views on the Aḥmadī movement, such individuals were disbelievers and apostates.[80]

Closer to Aḥmad Rażā's own views, the Deobandī renewal movement was also a proponent of *taqlīd* and open to a wider application of the Qurʾan and Sunna such that they considered Sufism permissible.[81] Thus, they could be considered to be supporters of the authenticity of the Qurʾanic experience and advocates of an application of the scriptures wider than the Ahl-i Ḥadīth. They clashed with Aḥmad Rażā mainly on certain beliefs (such as the Prophet having knowledge of the 'unseen' and being made of light) and practices (such as the *mawlid* and saint-days) associated with popular Islam or Sufism.[82] As my subsequent analysis will show, the reasons for these conflicts are complex - relating notably to theology and hermeneutical methods and assumptions - and cannot be fully captured by the three categories introduced above. Suffice to say here that according to Aḥmad Rażā, Wahhabi views had heavily influenced certain scholars associated with the Deobandī movement, and as a result he referred to them as Wahhabis as well.[83] For Aḥmad Rażā, these scholars and their followers were not proper Muslims, and in specific cases were guilty of disbelief. It

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movement as well. For examples of scholars who opposed the movement and considered its founder and followers as disbelievers, see: Khan, *From Sufism to Ahmadiyya*, 171-177.
Apparently, the Aḥmadī movement also treated non-Aḥmadīs as disbelievers, see: Khan, 68-69.

[79] For the Aligarh movement, see: Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India*, 315-335.

[80] Sanyal, *Devotional Islam and Politics in British India*, 203-204.

[81] Metcalf's seminal work on the movement is what I have referred to, see: Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India*.

[82] Sanyal, *Devotional Islam and Politics in British India*, 37-38; I also discuss some of these beliefs relating to the Prophet and the practice of the *mawlid* itself in subsequent chapters.

[83] Sanyal, *Ahmad Riza Khan Barelwi*, 105; Sanyal *Devotional Islam and Politics in British India*, 248.

was during his second ḥajj that he issued a fatwa, validated by ʿulamāʾ of the Hijaz, where he declared three scholars associated with the Deobandī movement guilty of disbelief (*kufr*). It was this fatwa that triggered a 'fatwa war' between the two groups, which resulted in the Ḥanafī Sunnis of India splitting into two schools of thought; that is the Barelwī and Deobandī.[84]

Lastly, the Nadwat al-ʿUlamāʾ[85] movement started off as a mainstream Sunni organization, one which was supported by Aḥmad Rażā initially. However, its members had a fall out with Aḥmad Rażā because of their approach of collaborating with 'other' Muslims such as those from the Ahl-i Ḥadīth and Aligarh movements, and the Shiʿa.[86] According to Aḥmad Rażā, any sort of interaction and cooperation was not permissible with 'bad' Muslims or those he considered not Muslims at all.[87] Thus, for him, the ʿulamāʾ associated with the Nadwat were guilty of maintaining ties with such groups and individuals, and therefore no longer 'proper' Muslims themselves.[88] **Table 1** analyzes the above-mentioned movements based on Voll's three themes and Aḥmad Rażā's response.

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[84] The fatwa related to four individuals: Mirzā Ghulām Aḥmad, Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī, Khalīl Aḥmad Ambethvī and Ashrafʿ Alī Thānvī. The first being the founder of the Aḥmadī movement and the latter three being from the founders of the Deoband seminary. For the background to this fatwa and its details, see: Usha Sanyal, "Are Wahhabis Kafir? Ahmad Riza Khan Barelwi and His Sword of the Haramayn," in *Islamic Legal Interpretation: Muftis and Their Fatwas*, ed. Muhammad Khalid Masud, et al. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 204-213.
As Sanyal concludes the main reason for these charges of disbelief was the denial of the Prophet's superiority, see: Sanyal, *Devotional Islam and Politics in British India*, 238.
[85] For the Nadwat see: Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India*, 335-347.
[86] Sanyal, *Devotional Islam and Politics in British India*, 219.
[87] Sanyal, 205.
[88] Sanyal, 220-221.

Table 1. Analysis of the Reform Movements in Aḥmad Rażā's Lifetime

Movement	Strict Qurʾan and sunna application	Opposed to *Taqlīd*	Authenticity and uniqueness of Qur'anic experience	Aḥmad Rażā's response[1]
Ahl-i Ḥadīth	✔	✔	✔	Disbelievers[1]
Aligarh	✕	✔	✕	Disbelievers[2]
Deobandī	✕	✕	✔	Disbelievers[1]
Nadwat	✕	✕	✕	'Bad' Muslims[3]
Aḥmadī	✕	✔	✕	Disbelievers[4]

Notes:
[1] The response I present here is one that he held on to, towards the later years of his life. Although, I discuss this in detail in chapter three, however to summarize, initially he considered certain statements of scholars belonging to the Ahl-i Ḥadīth and Deobandī movements as disbelief. This gradually progressed to a fatwa of disbelief pertaining to these specific scholars and then ultimately to fatwas treating all those who doubted their disbelief as disbelievers themselves.
[2] See: Sanyal, *Ahmad Riza Khan Barelwi*, 108.
[3] See: Sanyal, *Devotional Islam and Politics in British India*, 220-221.
[4] For an example of a fatwa where he declares Aḥmadīs and other groups as apostates and disbelievers, see: Aḥmad Rażā, *Fatāwā,* vol. 21 (Lahore: Rażā Foundation, 2002), 647.

1.4.3 *Aḥmad Rażā and Religious Reform*

Even though Aḥmad Rażā vehemently opposed the above-mentioned reformist movements, he himself displayed reformist tendencies, most significant of which was to push his community to adopt proper beliefs and behaviors.[89] The dichotomous scholarly assessment of British India, whereby by the later 19th century it was being considered by the ʿulamāʾ as *dār al-Islām*[90] wherein Muslims had the freedom to practice their faith, yet at the same time resisting the British in a non-confrontational manner, clearly had an impact on Aḥmad Rażā's approach towards the issues facing

[89]Sanyal, 201-202.
[90] Sanyal, 50.

his community.[91] For him, in line with other reform movements of his time, there was neither a need for jihad against the British nor to undertake the hijra (migration) from India.[92] However, as mentioned earlier, he was in favor of boycotting the courts. Furthermore, his focus too was towards reform in the Muslim community and one where devotion to the Prophet was central. He considered the Prophet to be made out of light, his intercession was ongoing even after his death, Sufi rituals and practices such as intercession from saints and celebrating their days, were permissible. Thus, Aḥmad Rażā's response to the conditions of his time was one where he advocated the Muslims to not only venerate the Prophet, but also attempt to establish a relationship with him so that they may be able to follow him better.[93] These aspects of his thought will be further discussed in subsequent chapters.

1.5 Aḥmad Rażā as a Scholar

Aḥmad Rażā's main teacher of significance was his father Naqī ʿAlī Khān. It was his father who taught him the *Dars-i Nizāmī* syllabus for traditional Islamic scholarship and ultimately trained him in issuing fatwas. As was expected, his father's views and theological standings also heavily influenced Aḥmad Rażā's.[94] Nevertheless, he was not shy of voicing his disagreements with contemporaries and those prior to him.[95] However, he was not someone who would break-away from tradition and exercise complete religious reform or *ijtihād*[96] since evidently, he was a follower of the Ḥanafī school of *fiqh,* which happened to be the dominant one in India at that time. Similar to the other muftis of his time, he was using his fatwas both as a

[91] Sanyal, 301.
[92] Sanyal, *Ahmad Riza Khan Barelwi*, 82.
[93] For details of these beliefs, see: Sanyal, 87-102; and chapter three.
[94] Sanyal, *Devotional Islam and Politics in British India*, 55.
[95] Sanyal, *Ahmad Riza Khan Barelwi*, 58.
[96] For a traditional view on *ijtihād* see: Wael Hallaq, "Was the Gate of Ijtihad Closed?" *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 16, no.1 (1984): 3–41.

source of guidance as well as personalized education on proper beliefs and behavior.[97] In his more than fifty years of career as a mufti, he seems to have left a vast corpus of fatwas and treatises, which is indicative of the attention and amount of effort he gave to the discipline. A cursory glance at the latest version of his fatwas and treatises compendium shows that in addition to issuing fatwas which addressed at least 6,500 questions, if not more, he also wrote more than 200 treatises on various topics.[98] Although, the work was published after Aḥmad Rażā's death, however, the first two volumes of the original version were actually published during his lifetime. [99] Furthermore, the order in which the fatwas are presented is very similar to certain Ḥanafī texts considered significant in British India, such as the *al-Hidāya* and *Fatāwā Hindiyya*.[100] This should not come as a surprise, given that the latter was the text referred to by judges towards the later part of the Mughal period and both these texts also formed the basis of the Anglo-Mohammadan law enforced by the British prior to their legal reforms of 1860s.[101] Given that Aḥmad Rażā was trying to address the perceived gap left due to the absence of Muslim courts where rulings were based mainly on these texts, it is expected that he used them as a broader framework for his compilation. Again, as we shall see in the next chapter, these two texts feature frequently on his discussions regarding the *mawlid*. Lastly, as is expected of fatwas, more than often they relate to multiple topics and therefore any sort of categorization

[97] Sanyal, *Devotional Islam and Politics in British India*, 38.
[98]This is based on the 30-volume version of his *Fatāwā Riḍwiyya* that is published by the Rażā Foundation from Pakistan. The first volume provides a quantitative summary of all the questions and treatises; see: Aḥmad Rażā, *Fatāwā*, vol. 1, part 1, (Lahore: Rażā Foundation, 1994), 6-7.
[99] Sanyal, *Devotional Islam and Politics in British India*, 181-182.
[100] Sanyal, 183 n. 67.
[101] Zaman, *Custodians of Change*, 21-22.

is challenging.[102] Similar is the case with the *Fatāwā Riḍwiyya*, one that will become more evident in the discussion in chapter two.

Theologically, Aḥmad Rażā was not only impacted by heightened focus on hadith in the Shāh Walī Allāh trend but also by the 'rationalist' or *maʿqūlī* focus of the Farangī Maḥal.[103] This was primarily because his main source of influence, that is his father, was associated with scholars from the Farangī Maḥal trend,[104] who had a significant focus on rational sciences (*maʿqūlāt*) such as logic. Subsequent to his father's death, he does not appear to have spent a significant amount of time studying under other scholars or at religious institutions.[105] Nevertheless, he was granted *sanads* from various ʿulamāʾ during his short stay in the Hijaz as part of his first hajj.[106] A scenario that was reversed during his second hajj, where he appears to be treated not only as an established mufti but also a teacher.[107] Ultimately, by 1900 he was viewed as a *mujaddid* (reviver of the religion) of the 14th century, and declared so by his followers.[108]

1.6 Aḥmad Rażā as a Sufi Shaykh

In addition to being a scholar, Aḥmad Rażā was also a Sufi shaykh in the Qādiriyya fraternity. Being a follower of the fraternity was also a significant source of influence on his views, especially on his Prophetology. The Qādiriyya order traces its origins to the Hanbalite scholar and Sufi master Shaykh ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī (d.

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[102] For a Deobandī example; see: Barbara D. Metcalf, "Two Fatwas on Hajj in British India," in *Islamic Legal Interpretation: Muftis and Their Fatwas*, ed. Muhammad Khalid Masud, et al. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 184; while for examples from within Aḥmad Rażā's corpus, see: Sanyal, *Devotional Islam and Politics in British India*, 183-184.
[103] Sanyal, *Ahmad Riza Khan Barelwi*, 59-60.
[104] Such as Faẓl-i Haqq Khairābādī (d. 1861) and 'Abd al-Qādir Badāyūnī (d. 1901), see: Metcalf, 298; Sanyal, *Devotional Islam and Politics in British India*, 59.
[105] Sanyal, *Devotional Islam and Politics in British India*, 56.
[106] Sanyal, 61.
[107] Sanyal, 64.
[108] Sanyal, 226-227.

1166), who's spiritual chain of transmission goes back to the Baghdadi mystic al-Junayd (d. 910). Thus, in line with al-Ghazālī (d. 1111), Shaykh ʿAbd al-Qādir was a model that represented the fusion of traditional scholarship with 'sober' Sufism, and one which was held in high esteem by Aḥmad Rażā. This tradition of sobriety in Sufism in the Qādiriyya was carried forward in the Indian region by the family of the Barkatiyya Sayyids of Marahra, who considered Sufism to complement the shariaʾ but not superseding it. It was Shāh Āl-i Rasūl Barkātī of this family that Aḥmad Rażā became a disciple of and continued his relationship with the family after the former's death. In fact, the Barkatiyyas considered themselves to be reformist Sufis, a characteristic which not only influenced Aḥmad Rażā but was also evident in his teachings.[109] For example, in one of his fatwas he states: '(there can be) no *tarīqat* without the *sharīʿat*'.[110]

Furthermore, Aḥmad Rażā's reverence for the founder of the fraternity, Shaykh ʿAbd al-Qādir can be highlighted through the following verses which he composed in praise of him:

> Wow O *Ghawth*! How elevated is your status!
> Your foot is higher than the heads of the Elect!
> How can one know what your head is like?
> When (even) the *awlīyāʾ* rub their eyes at your sole![111]

This exalted status is also reflected in Aḥmad Rażā's sayings and writings, who refers to Shaykh ʿAbd al-Qādir as *al-Ghawth al-Aẓam* or the 'Greatest Helper'.[112] This was not a new concept developed by Aḥmad Rażā, since it was already prevalent prior to him amongst both the followers of the Qādiriyya fraternity as well as the general Sufi-

[109] Sanyal, 41-42.
[110] Rażā Khān, *Fatāwā*, vol. 21, 522.
[111] Rażā Khān, *Ḥadāʾiq-i Bakhshish* (Karachi: Maktabah al- Madīnah, 2012), 19.
[112] For an example, see: Muḥammad Muṣṭafā Rażā Khān, *Malfūẓāt-i ʿAlā Ḥażrat* (Karachi: Maktabah al- Madīnah, 2014), 178.

inclined Muslims of the subcontinent.[113] Even prior to the advent of the Qādiriyya fraternity in India, there is evidence of Sufis holding the view that Shaykh ʿAbd al-Qādir was granted a unique spiritual status unlike anyone else.[114] According to Aḥmad Rażā, prior to Shaykh ʿAbd al-Qādir there was a physical *Ghawth* also referred to as the *Quṭb* or 'Pole' by some Sufi masters, who was the leader of the saints and would be replaced upon his death, by his deputy. In Islamic mysticism or Sufism, such an individual is considered to be the head of a hidden spiritual hierarchy and is responsible for directing the affairs of both the hidden and visible worlds.[115] Tracing the origins of this concept, Schimmel's (1975) conclusion is that it appears to have been first presented by al-Tirmidhī (d. 869), and was subsequently endorsed and presented by other Sufi masters such as Baqlī (d. 1209) and Ibn ʿArabī (d. 1240).[116]

However, in Aḥmad Rażā's worldview, after Shaykh ʿAbd al-Qādir this position is no longer available to anyone and it will remain so up until the appearance of al-Mahdī. Although, there is still a physical *Ghawth* present in every time, nevertheless he is in a sub-ordinate position to the *al-Ghawth al-Aẓam* that is Shaykh ʿAbd al-Qādir.[117] Moreover, Aḥmad Rażā's conceptualization of *wilāya* (sainthood) and the spiritual hierarchy appears to be a complicated model where there are not only additional levels and roles, but in fact these roles actually become stations and signify spiritual progression. Refer to Appendix 1 for a pictorial depiction of this model.

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113 Sanyal, *Devotional Islam and Politics in British India*, 144.
114 Malik mentions Ibn ʿArabī 'who regards Shaykh ʿAbd al-Qādir not only as the *quṭb* of his time, but as one with a special and specific rank accorded only to him,' see: Hamza Malik, *The Grey Falcon: The Life and Teaching of Shaykh ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 26.
115 For an overview of the *quṭb* and the spiritual hierarchy from one of the earliest Sufi texts, see: ʿAlī bin ʿUthmān al- Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-Mahjūb*, trans. Reynold A. Nicholson (London: Gibb Memorial Trust, 1911), 213-214; also see Malik's discussion of this in al-Jīlānī's thought: Malik, *The Grey Falcon*, 195-196.
116 Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 200.
117 Khān, *Malfūẓāt*, 178-180.

Ultimately, a key element of the Qādiriyya in Aḥmad Rażā's trend is the veneration of Shaykh ʿAbd al-Qādir himself. This veneration of Shaykh ʿAbd al-Qādir has also resulted in the adoption of certain rituals and practices such as the *Gyārahwīn Sharīf*,[118] special prayers for the Shaykh and calling him for help.[119] In fact Aḥmad Rażā recommends that after the death of one's Shaykh, they should become a disciple of a shaykh from the Qādiriyya fraternity.[120] This heightened veneration of Shaykh ʿAbd al-Qādir is one of the key characteristics in Aḥmad Rażā's trend of the Qādiriyya, which distinguishes it from other Sufi trends and orders in the region. This and other features ultimately resulted in him naming his version of the Qādiriyya as the Riżwiyya.[121]

Accordingly, beliefs and views associated with Shaykh ʿAbd al-Qādir heavily influenced Aḥmad Rażā. For instance, one key belief of Shaykh ʿAbd al-Qādir's and one that is very pertinent to this study, was that even after his passing away the Prophet has an 'intimate' and 'omnipresent' role in the lives of people. This is expressed in the following statement from him:

> "His (i.e. the Prophet's) heart and spiritual aspiration do not cease to be around the hearts of the people; he is the one who scents and perfumes their hearts, who adorns and purifies their inner consciousnesses (*sirr*), the one who opens the door of nearness for them, he is the maidservant, the ambassador between their hearts and inner consciousnesses, and their Lord, and every step one takes towards him makes him happier."[122]

As will be explored in chapter three, Aḥmad Rażā not only wholeheartedly adopted this concept, but took it one step further, where the Prophet could be physically present anywhere at any moment.

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[118] The *mawlid* of Shaykh ʿAbd al-Qādir on the 11th of every month of the Islamic calendar.
[119] Sanyal, *Devotional Islam and Politics in British India*, 148-149.
[120] Khān, *Malfūẓāt*, 64-65.
[121] Sanyal, *Ahmad Riza Khan Barelwi*, 93.
[122] Malik, *The Grey Falcon*, 202.

In addition to these views, Aḥmad Rażā also declared that it is obligatory (*wājib*) to become a disciple of a *Shaykh Kāmil* (the Perfect Guide) and states that the Prophet is an intercessor (*wasīla*) to God, and the shaykhs are a *wasīla* to the Prophet, and therefore without this *wasīla* it is not possible to reach God.[123] There also appears to be a significant focus in his Sufi teachings on removal of trials and sufferings through various methods, such as special *dhikr* (invocations), *duʿāʾ* (prayers) and calling upon the Prophet or *awlīyāʾ* (saints) for help.[124]

1.7 Prophetology in India

In the previous section, I briefly touched upon the influence of Shaykh ʿAbd al-Qādir's views relating to the Prophet on Aḥmad Rażā. Although Aḥmad Rażā's Prophetology will be further explored in chapter three, however, here I would like to highlight certain views about the Prophet's elevated status that were prevalent in India, closer to Aḥmad Rażā's time. This would allow one to appreciate the theological context in which the *mawlid* was being performed, since for certain ʿulamāʾ the ritual was also a celebration of the Prophet's elevated status. Using hadiths and opinions of scholars in his biographical work on the Prophet's life; *Madārij al-Nubūwwa*, ʿAbd al-Ḥaqq Muḥaddith al-Dihlawī (d. 1642) advocated that even in his death the Prophet was alive, and was viewed as such by his successors and therefore there was no distribution of his inheritance, since after 'tasting death' he is alive forever. [125] Furthermore, for ʿAbd al-Ḥaqq the reason of existence for the universe is the Prophet himself, who is also the first creation of God and from whom

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123 Aḥmad Rażā, *Fatāwā*, vol. 21, 463-64.

124 For examples of these, one can see the table of contents in the *Malfūẓāt* and notice a heavy focus on such practices. For instance, the prayer to be recited when someone meets one who has been afflicted by a trial, the Prophet being a source of fulfilling requests of Muslims, *Al-madad Ya-Rasūl Allah* (Help Me! O Messenger of God!), etc. See: Khān, *Malfūẓāt*, 3-22.

125 ʿAbd al-Ḥaqq Muḥaddith al-Dihlawī, *Madārij al-Nubūwwa*, vol. 2, trans. Sayyid Ghulām Muʿīn al-Dīn (Lahore: Shabbīr Brothers, 2004), 519.

the rest of the creation came into existence.[126] He also did not see any issue with the view that the Prophet can physically come out of his grave and travel wherever he wants to.[127] At another place, ʿAbd al-Ḥaqq clearly states that the prophets are never removed from their status of prophethood, and accordingly their prophethood and life continues in the same manner as it was prior to their death.[128]

Thus, viewing the Prophet to have such a preeminent status, it should not come as a surprise then that ʿAbd al-Ḥaqq also endorsed the *mawlid* ritual, which was a celebration of the Prophet's birth for him.[129] As we shall see in chapter three, Aḥmad Rażā's Prophetology was in line with these views as well. Moreover, ʿAbd al-Ḥaqq was not only a Ḥanafī scholar but was also a Sufi shaykh of the Qādiriyya; two domains which Aḥmad Rażā shared with him.

Almost a century later, the Indian reformer and *muḥaddith* Shāh Walī Allāh al-Dihlawī (d. 1762) was also presenting similar views. In his book *Fuyūḍ al-Ḥaramayn*, wherein he discloses his spiritual experiences during his pilgrimage in the Hijaz, he claims that he saw the Prophet in his bodily form. In fact, he goes on to state that he wished to see the Prophet's spirit but then realized that the Prophet's spirit and body being together was a special characteristic of the Prophet. For Shāh Walī Allāh, this was the meaning of the Prophet's sayings that the prophets are alive in their graves, and that they pray and perform the hajj as well.[130] Consistent with ʿAbd al-Ḥaqq, he also supports the view that the Prophet was created prior to Prophet Adam,[131] and that

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[126] Muḥaddith al-Dihlawī, 13.
[127] Muḥaddith al-Dihlawī, 522.
[128] ʿAbd al-Ḥaqq Muḥaddith al-Dihlawī, *Takmīl al-Imān*, with a commentary by Aḥmad Riżā Khān, trans. Iqbāl Aḥmad Fārūqī (Lahore: Maktabah Nabbaviyya, 1987), 116.
[129] Muḥaddith al-Dihlawī, *Madārij,* 30.
[130] Shāh Walī Allāh al-Dihlawī, *Fuyūḍ al-Ḥaramayn*, trans. ʿAbd al-Jabbār Leghārī (Hyderabad, Pakistan: Nafīs Printing Press, 2007), 34-35.
[131] Walī Allāh al-Dihlawī, 44.

his *nūr* (light) was created prior to all other creations.[132] Furthermore, he also appears to endorse the ritual of the *mawlid*. In the same book he refers to his spiritual experience of witnessing the *nūr* of the angels on the occasion of the Prophet's day of birth in Mecca. According to him, this occurred when people were mentioning the miracles and events that took place at the time of the Prophet's birth.[133] Similar to ʿAbd al-Ḥaqq, Shāh Walī Allāh was also a Sufi and one who had been initiated into other fraternities in addition to the Qādiriyya, Chistiyya and Naqashbandiyya.[134] Moreover, his foundation in *fiqh* had been in the Ḥanafī school, although later in life he was not shy of dissenting with the rulings of the school.[135] Nevertheless, it is not unreasonable to conclude that in views pertaining to the Prophet and the *mawlid*, Aḥmad Rażā found more in common with him, than with some of his successors; an aspect that will be explored further in the next chapter.

1.8 The Indian *Mawlid*

In Muslim lands, the *mawlid* has been organized and practiced at a government level since the early 11th century,[136] while at an individual level prior to this.[137] However, the exact origins of the *mawlid* appear to be inconclusive. Although Kaptein (1993) identifies it to be a Shiʿa festival that came into existence in the 11th century under Fatimid rule in Egypt, however he is inconclusive as to how the *mawlid* ended up in the Sunni world.[138] While according to Katz (2007), origin of the *mawlid* cannot be traced back to a single source or authority, and was in fact a gradual process that

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[132] Walī Allāh al-Dihlawī, 123.
[133] Walī Allāh al-Dihlawī, 33.
[134] J. M. S. Baljon, *Religion and Thought of Shāh Walī Allāh Dihlawī: 1703 – 1762*, eds. Krijn Peter Hesselink and Katinka Hesselink (Online eBook, 2012), 8-9, accessed March 6, 2020: http://www.katinkahesselink.net/sufi/baljon-dihwahli.html.
[135] Baljon, 109.
[136] Kaptein, *Muhammad's Birthday festival*, 29.
[137] Katz, *The Birth of the Prophet Muhammad*, 208.
[138] Kaptein, *Muhammad's Birthday festival*, 41-42.

evolved through various influences into the ritual prevalent in medieval times.[139] Regardless, of its origins, by the late 12th century it was being celebrated in Mecca, in addition to parts of Egypt and Iraq.[140] It was also around the same time that in addition to household, state level celebrations of the *mawlid* were also taking place in the Sunni world. These celebrations involved poetry, distribution of food and exchange of gifts.[141] It also appears that by this time the celebrations had turned to a grander level than they were earlier given that the first fatwas against these 'excesses' also appear around this time.[142]

Moreover, Mecca being a site of Muslim pilgrimage, it is no surprise that it would have acted as a catalyst for the ritual to spread out to the rest of the Muslim lands, including India. In the 12th and 13th centuries, not only were Muslims present in India but a significant part of the region was under Muslim rule.[143] Furthermore, the region of Sind in India which had been conquered during the reign of the Ummayads, was under Shiite rulers, where Fatimid influence was dominant.[144] Therefore, the ritual could have been introduced in the region as a result of the Fatimid influence as well. Moreover, the earliest celebrations of the ritual also involved Sufis,[145] and due to their networks, fraternities and travels across Muslim lands, this could have been another potential source for the introduction and propagation of the *mawlid* in India.[146] This is also supported by the fact that by the early 16th century in India, the Sufis were

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[139] Katz, *The Birth of the Prophet Muhammad*, 5.
[140] Kaptein, *Muhammad's Birthday festival*, 39.
[141] Kaptein, 42; Katz, *The Birth of the Prophet Muhammad*, 103.
[142] Katz, 70.
[143] During this period the region transitioned from the Ghaznavid dynasty to Ghurid rule, see: Peter Jackson, *The Delhi Sultanate: A Political and Military History*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
[144] Jackson, 3.
[145] Kaptein, *Muhammad's Birthday festival*, 42.
[146] For the history of Sufism in India, see: Saiyid Athar Abbas Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India*, Vol. 1 (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1978).

viewed as active celebrators of the ritual, with the rulers also encouraging it.[147] However, close to the same time period it was also being celebrated at an extravagant level in the Shiite kingdom of Golconda in Hyderabad, India, which not only had a religious fervor to it but also a cultural and social one, such that dancing girls, acrobats, artists and the likes were present in a carnival-like setting.[148] Nevertheless, it can safely be concluded that by the 16th century the *mawlid* ritual was a well-known practice in India. Furthermore, it continued to be practiced and promoted as is evidenced from certain Sufi and juristic texts from authors of the later period, for example Aḥmad al-Sirhindī[149] (d. 1624) and Shāh 'Abd al-ʿAzīz al-Dihlawī[150] (d. 1824).

By the early 19th century, and just prior to Aḥmad Rażā, the ritual of the *mawlid* had taken on a unique Indian flavor. In addition to meals being cooked, narrations relating to the Prophet's birth, miracles and death recited, the ritual seems to have involved a number of other practices unique to the subcontinent, such as a model of the 'foot print' of the Prophet being displayed in houses, an image of the *Burāq*[151] being created and taken out in the form of a procession that was placed next to the model of the foot print. Offerings were also made to the model and the image, and general processions were taken out on the 11th, 12th and 13th of the month. Recitation of the Qurʾan, religious narrations, poetry and music were an integral component of the celebrations. Although, the ritual was celebrated according to local culture; such

147 Al-Qārī, Mullā ʿAlī, *Al Mawrid Al Rawī Fi Mawlid Al-Nabī*, in Mawlid Al-Nabi ʿinda al-Aʾima wal Muhaddiththīn, trans. Muhammad Tahir-ul-Qadri (Lahore: Minhaj-ul-Quran Publications, 2004),75-77.
148 Schimmel, *And Muhammed Is His Messenger*, 147.
149 Aḥmad al-Sirhindī, *Maktūbāt*, vol. 3, trans. Muḥammad Aḥmad Saʿid (Karachi: Madīnah Publishing Company, 1972), 195.
150 Shāh 'Abd al-ʿAzīz al-Dihlawī, *Fatāwā ʿAzīziyya*, trans. Muḥammad Zakī (Karachi: H.M. Saeed Company, 1967), 199.
151 A flying-horse like animal which the Muslims believe the Prophet rode on the Night of Ascension (*al-isrāʾ wa-l-miʿrāj*).

as the use of incense, cooking not only those dishes that the Prophet is believed to have enjoyed but also in line with local tastes, poetry in regional languages and the use of local musical instruments. However, the actual practices performed as part of the ritual appear to also have fused with those performed by the Hindu population; such as processions being carried out and venerations of models and images.[152] Furthermore, there also seems to have been a prevalent trend of associating sorrow or mourning with the *mawlid* ritual in the month of Rabī al-Awwal[153], and was generally referred to as *Bāra Wafāt* (literally: 'the Death of the 12th'). [154] In fact, 'Abd al-ʿAzīz al-Dihlawī also refers it to as *Wafāt Sharīf* (Blessed Death). However, this aspect of the ritual appears to have 'died out' or at least become less relevant during Aḥmad Rażā's time since it does not come up for discussion in his fatwas. Based on a review of the petitions presented to Aḥmad Rażā relating to the practices associated with the *mawlid,* a clearer picture emerges of the ritual in his time.

By his time there appears to be a fusion of the *mawlid* ritual with the Shi'a practice of narrating the events of Karbalā.[155] As mentioned earlier, another potential foreign influence to the Sunni *mawlid* was also the practice of building models and images of religious characters and deriving 'blessings' from them, which was still common in Aḥmad Rażā's time.[156] Furthermore, the expression of deep respect and

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[152] Ja'far Sharif, *Islam in India or the Qanun-i-Islam - The Customs of the Musalmans of India,* ed. and trans. G.A. Herklots (New Delhi: Oriental Books Reprint Corporation, 1972), 188-190.
[153] Third month of the Islamic lunar calendar in which it is generally believed that the Prophet was born.
[154] Sh. Inayatullah, s.v. "Bārā Wafāt", in *Encyclopaedia of Islam,* 2nd ed., P. Bearman et al., accessed November 9, 2018, http://dx.doi.org.eres.qnl.qa/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_1270.
[155] Aḥmad Rażā, *Fatāwā*, vol. 23 (Lahore: Rażā Foundation, 2003), 747, 751; Riżā Khān, vol. 24 (Lahore: Rażā Foundation, 2003), 489, 514.
[156] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 21, 425.

veneration in the form of the practice of standing up during narration of the Prophet's birth or at the end of the ceremony (referred to as *qiyām*) was also prevalent.[157]

Mawlids were generally held in households.[158] However, *mawlids* were also conducted in public places such as on roads and in market places,[159] and inside mosques. In fact, at mosques the ritual was sometimes even held after Friday and *ʿĪd* prayers, and where poetry was also sung.[160] In certain cases it was even held in front of a walking funeral procession![161] Regardless of where it was held, there was bound to be some kind of decoration and illumination.[162]

It also appears that individuals that would not be viewed as scholars or even demonstrate outward behaviors of religious piety were being engaged to not only narrate events from the Prophet's life, but also sing poetry praising him in melodious voices. This was being done in groups or as a chorus, and in the format of the *ghazal,*[163] and sometimes in languages that the audience did not even understand.[164] Furthermore, in their recitals they were associating concepts with the Prophet that would be considered problematic by the scholars.[165] There also appear to be professional *mawlid* reciters who would perform for a fixed fee.[166] Nevertheless, scholars were still being invited to *mawlid* gatherings to deliver talks and to recite the narrations related to the ritual.[167] Similarly, there were women only *mawlids* taking

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[157] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 23, 730-731, 745.
[158] Aḥmad Rażā, 737, 744.
[159] Aḥmad Rażā, 723; Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 24, 490.
[160] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 8 (Lahore: Rażā Foundation, 1995), 123, 600; Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 22 (Lahore: Rażā Foundation, 2002), 239; Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 23, 409.
[161] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 9 (Lahore: Rażā Foundation, 1996), 140.
[162] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 23, 258; Riżā Khān, vol. 26 (Lahore: Rażā Foundation, 2004), 553.
[163] A form of prose usually associated with separation from or loss of a lover, common to the Persian and Urdu languages in the Indian subcontinent.
[164] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 6 (Lahore: Rażā Foundation, 1994), 605; Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 23, 722, 732, 734, 737.
[165] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 15 (Lahore: Rażā Foundation, 1999), 299, 302-03, 305, 309.
[166] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 19 (Lahore: Rażā Foundation, 2001), 502.
[167] Aḥmad Rażā, 167.

place, where narrations were being recited and poetry sung.[168] Accordingly, the ritual appears to be quite pervasive in the society, such that even those engaged in professions shunned by others (such as prostitution) were organizing it,[169] and even Hindus were participating in it.[170] Lastly, the Sufis, as they always have been, were strong proponents of the ritual, with their unique practices such as the *samāʾ* (audition) or the *qawwālī* (as referred to in the Indian subcontinent).[171]

Practices that have always been associated with the ritual; that is recitation of Qur'anic verses and distribution of food (ranging anywhere from simple sweets to lavish meals) was still a characteristic of the *mawlid* in 19th century British India.[172] Furthermore, animals were slaughtered specifically for the *mawlid*, sometimes as an offering to certain religio-cultural personalities and served to attendees.[173] It was in this setting that Aḥmad Rażā endorsed certain aspects of the *mawlid*, while completely rejecting others, which will be explored further in later chapters.

1.9 Conclusion

In addition to providing a biographical account, this chapter also analyzed key aspects of Aḥmad Rażā's personality; a scholar whose influence was not just restricted to India but was also felt in the Hijaz, and a Sufi shaykh who successfully established an off-shoot of the Qādiriyya fraternity. It also highlighted the significant influences upon him such that from issues of British rule, increasing influence of the Hindus in the public and political space, to Sunni Muslims with 'correct' beliefs interacting with 'heretics' and 'infidels', Aḥmad Rażā's concern for his community

[168] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 22, 240, 242, 245.
[169] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 23, 751; Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 24, 490.
[170] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 23, 723, 738.
[171] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 6, 605; Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 23, 561.
[172] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 23, 118; Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 23, 744.
[173] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 20 (Lahore: Rażā Foundation, 2001), 265.

increased as time went by. In this process, he defined what he considered to be the 'proper' Muslim community in British India, which he referred to as the Ahl-i Sunnat wa-l-Jamāʿat. The veneration of the Prophet was central to his belief. For him the Prophet is 'here and now', in the immanent; and can accordingly be experienced.

Lastly, this chapter also highlighted certain trends in Prophetology present prior to Aḥmad Rażā's time, and the manner in which the *mawlid* was conducted during his time. Accordingly, this will provide the relevant historical, cultural and to a certain extent theological context for analyzing his views regarding the ritual of the *mawlid* in subsequent chapters.

CHAPTER 2 – THOUGHT AND PRACTICE: VIEWS ON THE *MAWLID* AND THE DEBATES WITH CONTEMPORARIES

2.1 Introduction

In 19th century British India, the *mawlid* became a contested ritual amongst the Muslim scholars. These debates were not just restricted to the ritual being declared an innovation (*bidʿa*) or something new and thus prohibited, versus being considered permissible and even recommended, but also focused on 'correct performance' against what were viewed as 'un-Islamic' practices by certain ʿulamāʾ. Accordingly, in this chapter I tackle two topics; reconstruct certain dimensions of the *mawlid* debates in Aḥmad Rażā's time, and outline his normative definition of the ritual and associated practices through analyzing his fatwas.

2.2 The *Mawlid* Debates

The debates surrounding the ritual of the *mawlid* in 19th century British India can be categorized into two aspects: those pertaining to the permissibility versus impermissibility of the ritual itself; and those that related to certain practices associated with the ritual. As mentioned in chapter one, by the early 19th century Shāh 'Abd al-ʿAzīz al-Dihlawī[174] had already declared the ritual permissible, that is if it was in line with how it was performed at his house. Thus, for him the permissibility depended upon the proper performance of the ritual which was to ask God's blessings

[174] The son of the Indian reformer Shāh Walī Allāh al-Dihlawī (d. 1762), and a teacher, preacher and writer in his own regard, see: Sh. Inayatullah, s.v. "Shāh ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Dihlawī", in *Encyclopaedia of Islam,* ed. P. Bearman, et al., accessed on February 2, 2020. http://dx.doi.org.eres.qnl.qa/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_0080.

for the Prophet (*durūd*), recite the Qurʾan and authentic narrations, recite the *Fātiḥa*[175] upon food (whatever is available) and have someone with a melodious voice send salutations to the Prophet (*salām*). For Shāh ʻAbd al-ʿAzīz, anything other than this is against the shari'a and therefore not permissible. [176] However, Shāh ʻAbd al-ʿAzīz's fatwa is in response to a petition that asks the ruling for the *mawlid* as well as the practice of holding gatherings in Muḥarram (the first Islamic month) to commemorate the events of Karbalāʾ. In his response he does not seem to distinguish between the practices associated with both the rituals, and therefore it is difficult to clearly identify if there were any practices that were specific to the *mawlid* only, especially given that he refers to the *mawlid* as the 'Blessed Death' (*Wafāt Sharīf*). Based on this there appears to be an element of sorrow in both the rituals.

Perhaps it was during Shāh ʻAbd al-ʿAzīz's lifetime that the ritual itself would have become problematic for certain individuals close to him. Shāh Muḥammad Ismāʿīl (d. 1831), Shāh ʻAbd al-ʿAzīz's nephew and a disciple of Sayyid Aḥmad Barelvī (d. 1831), [177] viewed the ritual as impermissible. Although he did not address the *mawlid* directly, but focused instead on the broader practice of the *Fātiḥa* (mentioned earlier) and the death anniversaries of the saints (*ʿurs*).[178] He accepted that the basis (*aṣl*) of the practice was very good and in line with the shariʾa, however when: lavish meals and specific kinds of food were being prepared; people had started viewing it as a requirement; dates were being fixed; and it was serving a worldly

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[175] Although literally the word refers to the 'first chapter of the Qur'an,' however, in the Muslim world it is generally taken to be synonymous with the practice of *īṣāl-i thawāb*, whereby the living after reciting certain verses from the Qur'an, pray and transmit the rewards of their good deeds to the deceased. Later in this chapter, I discuss the permissibility of this practice in Aḥmad Rażā's thought in connection with the *mawlid*.

[176] Shāh ʻAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Dihlawī, *Fatāwā ʿAzīziyya*, trans. Muḥammad Zakī (Karachi: H.M. Saeed Company, 1967), 199-200.

[177] Sayyid Aḥmad Barelvī himself was a disciple and student of Shāh ʻAbd al-ʿAzīz. For him and Shāh Muḥammad Ismāʿīl see: Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India;* 52-63.

[178] "Notice of the Peculiar Tenets Held by the Followers of Syed Ahmad, Taken Chiefly from the "Sirát-úl-Mústaqím," a Principal Treatise of the Sect, Written by Moulaví Mahommed Ismaíl," trans. J.R.C., *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 1 (1832): 485-86.

purpose as opposed to its original objective, then it was no longer permissible to practice it.[179]

Thus, there were already disagreements regarding the permissibility of the ritual in the beginning of the 19th century and that too within the same circle of scholars. Moreover, it appears that up until this time the basis of the disagreement was more related to the practices and the beliefs associated with the ritual, rather than the ritual itself. However, towards the second half of the 19th century, the founders of the Ahl-i Ḥadīth movement started to advocate a more restrictive view where the ritual was considered to be an innovation (*bidʿa*) per se. [180] In his short fatwa on the issue, Ṣiddīq Ḥasan Khān (d. 1890) labeled the ritual, and accompanying practices an innovation, since it was never performed in the first three centuries of Islam (*qurūn-i thalāthah*).[181] This fatwa was also endorsed by a number of other scholars, especially those associated with the Deobandī movement, whose views on the issue will be discussed shortly as well.[182] Similarly, Naẓīr Ḥussain (d. 1902) in multiple fatwas declared the ritual, and as a result all of its manifestations and practices, an innovation and thus prohibited. His main argument was the same as Ḥasan Khān's; that this was never performed in the Prophet's life, nor by the Companions or the Successors and therefore cannot be permissible.[183] For the scholars associated with the Ahl-i Ḥadīth

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179 This is a summary of his arguments, for details see: Muḥammad Ismāʿīl, *Ṣirāṭ-i Mustaqīm* (Deoband: Idāra al-Rashīd, n.d), 73-79.

180 For a background on the movement and brief biographies of its two leaders discussed here; Ṣiddīq Ḥasan Khān and Naẓīr Ḥussain, see: Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India;* 268-96.

181 There is also an indication by certain writers of Ḥasan Khān being a supporter of the *mawlid* and to have written a treatise in support of it titled: *Al-Shamāma al-ʿAnbarīyya min Mawlid Khayr al-Barīyya*, see: Muhammad Tahir-ul-Qadri, *Mīlād al-Nabī* (Lahore: Minhaj-ul-Quran Publications, 2008), 384. Unfortunately, I have not been able to verify if this work is indeed Ḥasan Khān's since he is not mentioned as the author on the version of the treatise I have access to and neither is this work listed by Saeed Ullah as Ḥasan Khān's treatise in his work on the scholar, see: Saeed Ullah, *The Life and Works of Muhammad Siddiq Hasan Khan, Nawab of Bhopal, 1248-1307 (1832-1890)* (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1973), 195-198. On the contrary Saeed Ullah explicitly states in his assessment of Ḥasan Khān's doctrines to be someone who denounced the celebration, see: Saeed Ullah, *The Life and Works of Muhammad Siddiq Hasan Khan*, 140.

182 Ṣiddīq Ḥasan Khān, *Fatāwā* (Lahore: Maktabah Muḥammadiyya, 2013), 177-80.

183 Naẓīr Ḥussain, *Fatāwā Naḍhīriyya*, vol. 1 (Lahore: Ahl-i Ḥadīth Academy, 1913), 214-15, 221-23.

movement the objective or intention behind the ritual was no longer a valid argument for its permissibility. In line with their reformist programme, as the ritual was not explicitly sanctioned by the Qurʾan and hadith, therefore it could never be accepted as permissible under any circumstances. Both of the Ahl-i Ḥadīth leaders were to a certain extent influenced by the extended scholarly circle of Shāh Abd al-ʿAzīz; Ḥasan Khān's father was a disciple of Shāh Abd al-ʿAzīz, and Naẓīr Ḥussain himself studied from Shāh Abd al-ʿAzīz's grandson.[184] Consequently, the idea of reforming rituals was not new; however its application by some scholars became sterner in a post-1857 British India.

In a similar vein were the views of the founder of the Aḥmadiyya movement, who considered the various practices associated with the ritual, such as performing the *qiyām*, to be an innovation. He advocated for the recitation of the *mawlid* but not in the form that it had taken on in the 19th century. For him the narration of the birth of the Prophet and other events from his life, after removing the elements of *bidʿa*, was equivalent to delivering a sermon. This was a form of remembrance of the Prophet (what he refers to as '*mawlid* recitation'), and was not only permissible but recommended as well.[185] In essence, for Mirzā Ghulām Aḥmad the 'proper' *mawlid* was simply a sermon narrating the events of the Prophet's life. As Hussain Khan (2015) has observed, prior to his messianic claims, Ghulām Aḥmad had close relationships with certain key members of the Ahl-i Ḥadīth movement; Muḥammad Ḥussain Batālwī (d. 1920) who was his classmate and friend, and Naẓīr Ḥussain himself, who at some point became his religious teacher and performed his second

[184] Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India;* 276.
[185] Mirzā Ghulām Aḥmad, *Malfūẓāt*, vol. 3 (Rabwa: Naẓārat Ashāʿat, 1960), 159-160.

marriage.[186] Thus, these close relationships with the Ahl-i Ḥadīth scholars might have influenced his approach towards certain matters, such as his views on the *mawlid*.

On the other end of the spectrum was the Aligarh movement led by Syed Ahmad Khan, who was not against the ritual *per se*, but was in favor of revamping the narrations and material discussed during the ceremony. In his early years he had published a *mawlid* work which included limited traditional narrations on the Prophet and wherein he did not mention miracles of the Prophet, which was unusual for *mawlid* texts of the time. His text focused more on the moral aspects of the Prophet's personality.[187] However, in his later years he even criticized some of these limited traditions that he had included in the text.[188] Similar to scholars after Shāh Abd al-ʿAzīz, who were influenced by his approach of conducting the *mawlid* in a 'proper' manner, Syed Ahmad Khan was also impressed by the teachings and works of Shāh Walī Allāh, Shāh Abd al-ʿAzīz himself, and Shāh Muḥammad Ismāʿīl.[189] Furthermore, this approach of revising the curriculum of the ritual, appears to be in line with his broader educational and social reforms program.

With the Deobandī movement matters became complicated. During Aḥmad Rażā's time, scholars close to the early days of the Deobandī movement were divided on the issue of the *mawlid's* permissibility. Broadly, there were three trends: complete opposition;[190] permissible for the elite (scholars) who could identify its objectionable aspects and reform or removal of certain practices[191]; and permissibility.[192] According

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[186] Hussain Khan, *From Sufism to Ahmaddiya*, 171-72.
[187] Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India;* 317.
[188] Hafeez Malik, *Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan and Muslim Modernization in India and Pakistan* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1980), 274.
[189] Malik, 261, 264, 269.
[190] This was mainly associated with the group of scholars led by Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī. See: Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India;* 150.
[191] Associated with Muḥammad Qāsim Nanūtwī. See: Metcalf, 151.
[192] Associated with Imdād Allah al-Muḥajir al-Makkī and also an initial position of Ashraf ʿAlī Thānvī. See: Metcalf, 172.

to Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī (d. 1905),[193] who not only admired Shāh Muḥammad Ismāʿīl but frequently referenced his works and encouraged his students to read them as well,[194] the *mawlid* was a *bidʿa* and therefore impermissible; an opinion which happened to be perfectly in agreement with the Ahl-i Ḥadīth scholars.[195] In fact he was one of the Deobandī scholars who endorsed Ḥasan Khān's earlier mentioned fatwa.[196] He was also not in favor of accepting any good that could come out of a ritual based on illegitimate practices. However, he appears to be supportive of lectures on the Prophet's birth and life and when once requested, even sent one of his students and disciple (a scholar in his own regard), Khalīl Sahāranpurī (d. 1927) to conduct a 'proper' *mawlid* gathering. Khalīl Sahāranpurī's views regarding the *mawlid* were slightly different than his Shaykh's. Although he considered the ritual to be an innovation, however, if it was removed of all the 'excesses' such as quoting weak narrations, mixing of genders, overindulgence in illumination, and beliefs such as the ritual being obligatory, declaring those who do not participate in it as disbelievers, the Prophet being present in the gathering and as a result performing the *qiyām*, then it was no longer a *bidʿa*.[197] Incidentally, this was also the view adopted by Ashraf ʿAlī Thānvī (d. 1943)[198] later in his life, after revisiting his earlier stance of permissibility.[199] Lastly, both Ashraf ʿAlī Thānvī and Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī's Sufi shaykh, Ḥajī Imdādullāh al-Muḥajir al-Makkī (d. 1896) did not consider the *mawlid* to intrinsically be a *bidʿa*, and instead considered some of the blameworthy acts and beliefs treated as excesses by Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī and Khalīl Sahāranpurī as

[193] For his biographical details, see: Metcalf, 78-80.
[194] Brannon D. Ingram, *Revival from Below: The Deoband Movement and Global Islam* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2018), 58.
[195] Ingram, 66.
[196] Ḥasan Khān, *Fatāwā*, 179.
[197] Ingram, *Revival from Below*, 67, 68.
[198] For details of his life, see: Ingram, 73.
[199] Ingram, 77.

minor transgressions. In fact, he saw no issue with fixing a date for the *mawlid*, performing the *qiyām*, and the belief that the Prophet can be present in such gatherings. For him prohibiting the complete ritual was like: 'burning one's rug because of a single flea.'[200] Ḥajī Imdādullāh was a disciple of shaykhs who themselves were Sayyid Aḥmad Barelvī's disciples.[201] However, his views on the *mawlid* seem to be a contrast to the general consensus of scholars influenced by Sayyid Aḥmad's reformist tendencies. One of the reasons for this difference could be that he was generally not viewed as a scholar, but more of a Sufi or mystic and thus his legal reasoning might have been considered weak or 'flawed' by some.[202] Therefore, in the early Deobandī movement we see a reflection of all the significant view-points regarding the ritual up until the late 19th century.

As might be evident by now, the scholars mentioned so far, were in some manner influenced more by the hadith-based reformist inclinations of Shāh Walī Allāh and some of his successors. On the other hand, and as mentioned in chapter one, Aḥmad Rażā was impacted by both the Farangī Maḥal trend and Shāh Walī Allāh's hadith focused approach to a certain degree.[203] In my view, this is a key differentiator between these scholars and Aḥmad Rażā and is also one of the factors that resulted in disagreements regarding the *mawlid* at that time. The Farangī Maḥal approach focused considerably more on rational sciences (*maʿqūlāt*) such as logic[204] and we see a reflection of this in Aḥmad Rażā's argumentation in support of the *mawlid* and associated practices. For instance, one of his main argument in support of the ritual is

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[200] Ingram, 72.
[201] Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India;* 79.
[202] Ingram, 69-70.
[203] In fact, as Sanyal observes Shāh ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Dihlawī was viewed as a *mujaddid* by the Barelwī movement, see: Sanyal, *Ahmad Riza Khan Barelwi*, 229.
[204] Asad Q. Ahmed, "Logic in the Khayrābādī School of India: A Preliminary Exploration," in *Law and Tradition in Classical Islamic Thought: Studies in Honor of Professor Hossein Modarressi*, ed. Michael Cook, et al. (New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), 236-37.

that there is no specific command prohibiting it, as opposed to his opponents view that if it is not specifically designated as permissible through the Qurʾan, hadith and accepted practices of the first three centuries of Islam, then it is not allowed. This inherent tension between the two assumptions and hermeneutical methods is also one of the underlying causes for other disagreements that he had with his contemporaries. Although, Ahmed and Pourjavady (2016) conclude that parts of these differing traditions that is the Farangī Maḥal and Shāh Walī Allāh's hadith-based, were absorbed separately by the two dominant movements in the subcontinent, that is the Barelwī and Deobandī.[205] However, it is not fair to assume that there was a complete disconnect between logic and hadith in Aḥmad Rażā's approach. A more prudent observation would perhaps be that he synthesized the two in a unique manner and to a different degree then his counterparts.

2.3 Aḥmad Rażā's Response

It was in the context of such trends of the 19th century, wherein either there was a call to reform the ritual itself or to declare it impermissible, that Aḥmad Rażā presented his views on the *mawlid*. Accordingly, in this section I offer an overview of his opinions regarding the *mawlid* and its associated practices. While in the following section, I analyze his fatwas relating to a number of issues associated with the *mawlid* in more detail in order to highlight the subtleties involved in his understanding of the ritual. Moreover, in chapter three I further tackle two categories of fatwas that are key in relation to his Prophetology; that is performing the *qiyām*, and Prophetic presence in the *mawlid* gatherings.

For Aḥmad Rażā, the ritual of the *mawlid* was permissible, including fixing a date for it such as in the month of Rabīʿ al-Awwal, the recitation of the Qurʾan,

[205] Asad Q. Ahmed and Reza Pourjavady, "Theology in the Indian Subcontinent," in *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, ed. Sabine Schmidtke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 622.

'appropriate' poetry in praise of the Prophet but without music, distribution of sweets, illumination and decorations, and performing the *qiyām* were all permissible.[206] However, he does detail the correct modalities of these practices in his fatwas and therefore should not be taken on face value as a blanket allowance.[207] This approach puts him more in line with Shāh ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Dihlawī's view of performing the ritual but in a correct manner. Moreover, his basic argument for permissibility of the ritual itself, and in contrast to those scholars of his time that considered it an innovation was: there is no evidence for not performing it.[208] On the contrary for him, as Sajjad (2018) has concluded, to remember and express love for the Prophet is allowed by God and therefore even if people transgressed the shariʿa during its performance, the scholars have no authority to stop the ritual itself.[209] This view of his, where the *mawlid* should not be deemed impermissible due to people's transgressions, echoes Ḥajī Imdādullāh's stance.

It might be worthwhile to outline how a *mawlid* gathering was held under Aḥmad Rażā's direction in order to appreciate his understanding of the 'correct' performance of the ritual. There is some documentary evidence available on how such a gathering was held towards the end of his life, that is in 1916. The ritual was held on exactly the 12th of Rabīʿ al-Awwal and involved two sermons from Aḥmad Rażā; one after the morning prayers (*fajr*) and the second after the night prayers (*ʿishāʾ*). Prior to both sermons being delivered, a trained reciter of poetry in praise of the Prophet (*naʿat khawān*) recited poetry and at the moment of the mention of the Prophet's birth, *qiyām* was performed. Subsequent to which, Aḥmad Rażā delivered his sermons.

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[206] Mohammad Waqas Sajjad, "For the Love of the Prophet: Deobandi-Barelvi Polemics and the Ulama in Pakistan", Phd. diss., University of California, Berkley, 2018, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, 209-10.
[207] Some of these are discussed in the next section and the following chapter.
[208] Sajjad, *For the Love of the Prophet*, 213.
[209] Sajjad, 212.

Even the content of the sermons appears to be focused on a defense of the ritual and its practices, such as its objective being to recall God's blessing in the form of the Prophet, and permissibility of distributing food. Furthermore, the sermon focused more on a discussion of his Prophetology as well. After his sermon, the event ended with the *naʿat khawān* reciting another poem invoking God's blessings upon the Prophet (*durūd*).[210] Thus, he took a stance against certain contentious issues relating to the ritual through not only his works but also practically demonstrating his understanding of acceptable normative behaviors.

2.4 Aḥmad Ražā's *Mawlid* Fatwas

Aḥmad Ražā's *Fatāwā Riḍwiyya* addresses more than 6,500 questions on various topics, out of which the *mawlid* related fatwas form a very small percentage, that is less than 2% of the total questions answered or 116 fatwas in total. For a synopsis of these 116 fatwas refer to Appendix 2. Furthermore, out of these 116 fatwas, five actually are treatises in response to petitions, but given the total quantity of treatises included in his *Fatāwā* (206 to be precise), still this is an insignificant percentage (under 2.5%). This indicates that there were other far more important issues that had our Mufti occupied than the *mawlid*; a potential area for further research perhaps. Nevertheless, these 116 fatwas were identified through a search of the 30 volumes of his *Fatāwā* using key words in Urdu generally associated with the ritual, such as *mawlid, milād and mawlūd*. **Table 2** provides a breakdown of the quantity of relevant fatwas in volumes of the *Fatāwā*.

[210] Sanyal, *Ahmad Riza Khan Barelwi*, 159-161.

Table 2. Number of *Mawlid* Fatwas in Volumes of the *Fatāwā Riḍwiyya*

Volume	*Mawlid* Fatwas per Volume	Percentage of total *Mawlid* fatwas
23	31	27%
29	16	14%
21	8	7%
6	7	6%
15	6	5%
14, 19, 22, 26	5	4%
9, 16, 24	4	3%
8, 13	3	3%
5, 10, 20, 30	2	2%
7, 25	1	1%

As is evident, volume 23 contains the most fatwas relevant to *mawlid*, which is expected given that it has a whole chapter dedicated to the *mawlid* and similar rituals. For the rest of the volumes, the fatwas appear to be scattered under various topics; for instance, volume 29 has a significant number of *mawlid* fatwas under sections dealing with matters of belief and creed (*ʿaqāʾid*) and so does volume 21 which has a whole chapter on matters pertaining to food and drink. As mentioned earlier, fatwas more than often relate to multiple topics and therefore any sort of categorization is challenging and this was the case with Aḥmad Rażā's *mawlid* related fatwas as well. However, primarily basing on the question from the petitioner and then analyzing Aḥmad Rażā's response, I was able to classify the fatwas in broad categories. These top categories with the greatest number of fatwas are presented in **table 3**.

Table 3. Categories with the Greatest Number of *Mawlid* Fatwas

Mawlid Category	*Mawlid* Fatwas	Percentage of total *Mawlid* fatwas
Reciter requirements	17	15%
Content	14	12%
Permissibility	13	11%
Spending	13	11%
Qiyām	10	9%
Wahhabis and Deobandīs	8	7%
Food	8	7%
Relations with deniers	8	7%
Organizer requirements	5	4%
Prophetic presence	4	3%
Women	4	3%

These categories makeup 92% of the total *mawlid* fatwas. Although, in the previous section I have already presented an overview of his opinions regarding the *mawlid* and its associated practices based on these fatwas, here I will analyze in detail certain sub-categories of the *mawlid* fatwas. Since *qiyām*, Prophetic presence, Wahhabis and Deobandīs, and relations with deniers will be discussed in the next chapter in the context of Aḥmad Rażā's Prophetology, here I will tackle the remaining categories. As a result of this analysis, I should be able to present a view of his thought and experience regarding the ritual. However, prior to this, I would like to present certain high-level observations regarding the geographic trends and conditions under which these fatwas were produced. I will also address the question why the majority of these fatwas were written towards the very end of his life. Furthermore, I will briefly discuss the question how Aḥmad Rażā authorized his argumentation, that is what authoritative references figure most prominently in these fatwas.

A quick review of the locations from where Aḥmad Rażā was receiving his petitions reveals that most of these were in and around the United Provinces of British India. **Figure 1** presents the various locations from where these petitions were received.

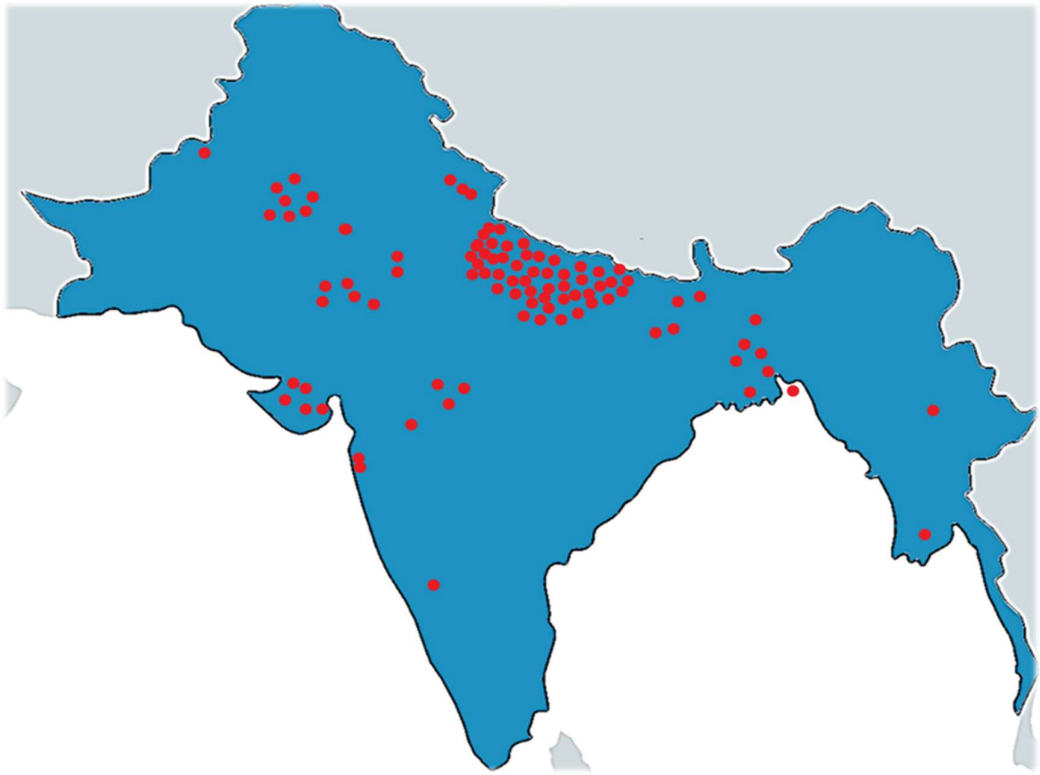

Figure 1. Locations of *Mawlid* Related Petitions

This is no surprise given that, and as identified by Sanyal (1996), the institutional bases of the movement associated with Aḥmad Rażā and his earlier supporters from amongst the ʿulamāʾ were located around this region.[211] However, it might also have to do with the fact that in the late 19th and early 20th centuries the Hindustani language (a term used by the British rulers for referring to both Urdu and Hindi) was widely spoken in these regions only.[212] This can be gleamed from the 1911 census of British

[211] Sanyal, *Devotional Islam and Politics in British India*, 69.
[212] David Lelyveld, "Colonial Knowledge and the Fate of Hindustani," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 35, no. 4 (1993): 668.

India, whereby out of the 98 million Indians who spoke some form of Hindi, [213] around 72 million were residents of the region comprising of United Provinces and Bihar.[214] Regardless of the actual reason and number of petitions received from each location, it is evident that the *mawlid* had become a subject of some concern across the region and that Aḥmad Rażā was known in some of the farthest parts of British India.

Over the 40 years (1299-1339 A.H./1881-1921 C.E.) during which these fatwas were issued; it appears that the bulk of these (almost 50%)[215] were issued towards the last six years of Aḥmad Rażā's life (1334-1339 A.H). **Figure 2** presents a graphical representation of the timing of these *mawlid* fatwas. In fact, for the first 20 years he only issued 19 fatwas pertaining to the *mawlid*, the first couple being related to the permissibility of performing the *qiyām*. It seems that only in 1320 A.H./1902 C.E the first fatwa on the permissibility of the ritual makes an appearance. This in no way implies that the permissibility of the ritual was not being contested prior to this year. Since some of the initial fatwas pertaining to its impermissibility from scholars associated with the Deobandī and Ahl-i Ḥadīth movements had already appeared by 1874 and were being disseminated in the scholarly circles for endorsement purposes.[216]

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[213] The British did not segregate between Hindi and Urdu. They were loosely clubbed into three broad categories; Hindi, Western Hindi and Eastern Hindi. For a discussion of this, see: Lelyveld, 665-682.
[214] For the data in support of this, see tables 20 and 21 in: *Statistical Abstract Relating to British India from 1910-11 to 1919-20* (London: His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1922), 18-22.
[215] Out of the 116 fatwas, 102 have a year mentioned. 54 of these were issued towards the last six years of his life. For further details see figure 2.
[216] The madrasa at Deoband had emerged by 1867 while one of the earliest dates stated pertaining to the Deobandī muftis endorsing Ḥasan Khān's fatwa (mentioned earlier) is 1290 A.H (approximately 1873 C.E.), see: Ḥasan Khān, *Fatāwā*, 179.

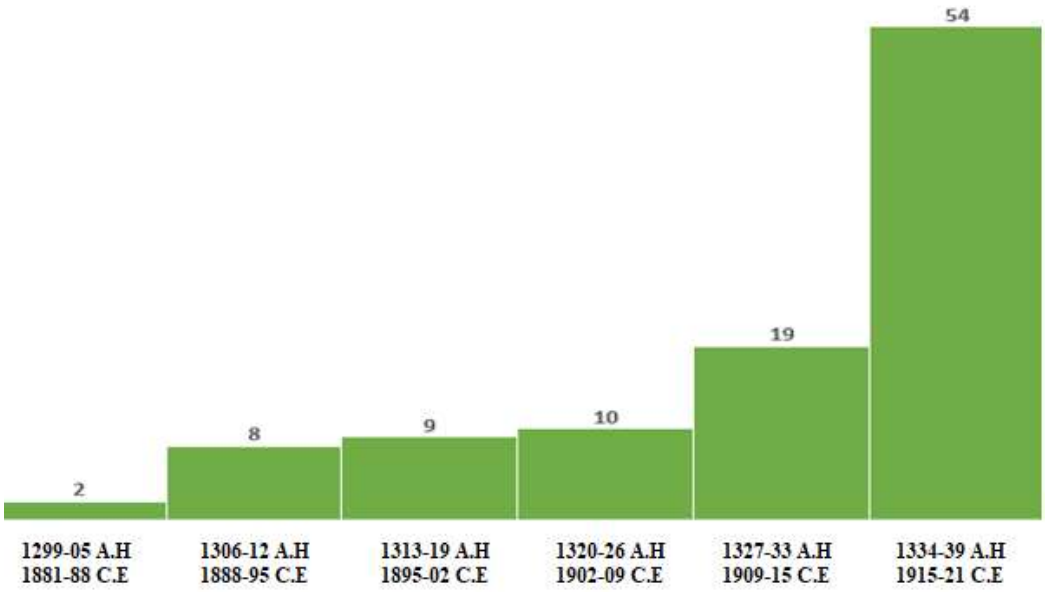

Figure 2. Time Period of the *Mawlid* Related Fatwas

Perhaps one of the reasons for this anomaly might relate to the fact that the issuance of a fatwa depends upon the mufti receiving a petition (*istiftāʾ*).[217] If Aḥmad Rażā did not receive any questions during this period then there would accordingly be no related fatwas. However, this raises another question: why did Aḥmad Rażā not receive any petitions during this period given that the *mawlid* was already a contested ritual? In my view, this has to do with his popularity as a mufti increasing only towards the later part of his fatwa-writing career. There were three key events that raised his profile amongst his followers and scholars associated with him: first he was declared a *mujaddid* in a gathering of scholars in 1900; second he issued the controversial fatwa declaring certain scholars guilty of disbelief in 1906; and third he had access to disseminate his teachings in a widely circulated regional newspaper from 1910.[218] It is also around this year, that is 1328 A.H./1910 C.E., when we see an increase in the number of petitions being received by Aḥmad Rażā pertaining to the

[217] On the significance of the petition, see: Muhammad Khalid Masud, "The Significance of Istiftāʾ in the Fatwā Discourse," *Islamic Studies* 48, no. 3 (2009), 341-366.
[218] Sanyal, *Devotional Islam and Politics in British India*, 88, 226-227, 231.

mawlid. However, whether this is consistent with the overall trend of a substantial increase in petitions generally, is something that requires additional research and beyond the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, there is an indication of an overwhelming number of petitions being received by Aḥmad Rażā towards the later part of his life such that he had a number of his students assisting him in issuing these.[219]

Another aspect of these petitions is the fact that they appear to have been mostly from individuals belonging to the non-scholarly class.[220] While there are questions from individuals that appear to be scholars, teachers and students associated with religious institutions, these seem to focus mostly on the correct modalities of the ritual as opposed to its permissibility.[221] This indicates that for most scholars petitioning to Aḥmad Rażā, the permissibility of the ritual was a non-issue.

Furthermore, if we analyze the sources used by Aḥmad Rażā in his *mawlid* fatwas, it appears that in 29 (25%) fatwas he does not refer to other texts and provides no sources at all. This approach of a mufti not providing their sources is not unique and has been prevalent since the classical times.[222] Out of the fatwas where he does provide sources (87), he uses the Qurʾan and hadith in 44% and 37% of these respectively, to support his reasoning. This highlights the importance for him of quoting scripture in support of his arguments. There are three verses that he quotes frequently from the Qurʾan:

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[219] Sanyal, 180-81.
[220] This is based on a review of the information provided in the petition relating to the petitioner. More often than not, the title before the name (such as *Mawlvī*) of the individual or other references within the question indicate whether they are from the scholarly class or not. This is based on 65 of 93 petitions (approximately 70%) where I was able to find this information. For details see Appendix 2.
[221] There are only three such petitions from scholars inquiring about permissibility. However, they also include the various practices associated with the ritual in their petition.
[222] Masud, "The Significance of Istiftāʾ," 347.

> "Say: In the bounty of Allah and in His mercy: therein let them rejoice. It is better than what they hoard." (10:58) [223]
> "Therefore of the bounty of thy Lord be thy discourse." (93:11)[224]

He quotes each of these in six separate fatwas and for him the 'bounty' of God is the Prophet and thus it should be mentioned and rejoiced; and what better way than through the *mawlid*. In addition, he also quotes, the following verse:

> "That ye (mankind) may believe in Allah and His messenger, and may honour Him, and may revere Him, and may glorify Him at early dawn and at the close of day." (48:09)[225]

Although Pickthall (1930) translates this verse to mean honoring and revering God, however, Aḥmad Rażā reads this to apply to the Prophet instead.[226] And accordingly, the *mawlid* is a way of honoring and revering the Prophet.

From the hadith literature, the top most quoted texts are: *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (13 times), *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* (11 times) and *Sunan Abī Dāwūd* (10 times), which indicate his concern for using sources where there was generally minimum disagreement amongst the scholars of his time. However, being a Sufi shaykh, one would have expected him to also quote amply from Sufi works, but this does not appear to be the case for the *mawlid* fatwas. He only refers to eight Sufi texts[227] such as al-Ghazālī's (d. 1111) *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* and *Kimiyā-e Saʿādat*, and of these only al-Zabīdī's (d. 1790) *Itḥāf al-Sāda al-Muttaqīn*, a commentary on the *Iḥyā'*, is quoted 7 times. The rest are referred to only once. Thus, not surprisingly, the bulk of his sources (56% or in 49 fatwas) are from *fiqh* related texts. Furthermore, within these *fiqh* texts the most frequently cited manuals are: al-Ḥaskafī's (d. 1677) *Durr al-Mukhtār Sharḥ Tanwīr al-Abṣār* (14 times) and Ibn ʿĀbidīn's (d. 1836) commentary on it titled *Radd al-*

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[223] In Pickthall's version of the translation this is appearing as verse 59 of chapter 10, see: Marmaduke Pickthall, *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran: An Explanatory Translation* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1930), 216.
[224] Pickthall, 656.
[225] Pickthall, 529.
[226] For an example of this, see: Aḥmad Rażā, *Fatāwā*, vol. 23, 750.
[227] That is those I was able to clearly identify as focused on Sufi or mystical related subjects.

Muḥtār ʿala Durr al-Mukhtār (18 times), and *al-Fatāwa al-Hindīyya* (10 times) composed under the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb's (d. 1707) patronage. These all happen to be Ḥanafī texts, which was the school of *fiqh* Aḥmad Rażā followed. Another observation is that he appears to not only rely on Ḥanafī manuals that were closer to his time, but also which were accepted and referred to by his main counterparts, the Deobandīs as well.[228] Overall, this concern of using sources that would be accepted as valid by his contemporaries confirms Sajjad's (2018) observation that:

> "…he emerges as much a legalist as he is a Sufi, and the *milad* [*mawlid*] is not for him a Sufi tradition but rather a Muslim one."[229]

2.4.1 *Permissibility of the Mawlid*

One can see Aḥmad Rażā's legalist character on full display in his fatwas pertaining specifically to the *mawlid's* permissibility. I have already highlighted his views on the *mawlid* being a permissible ritual, which he bases on certain Qurʾanic verses. However, in his fatwas he appears to lay down a condition for this permissibility, which is the manner in which the ritual was performed in his time in the Hijaz.[230] Thus, similar to Shāh ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Dihlawī, whose reference for the 'proper' demonstration of the ritual was the manner in which it was conducted at his home, for Aḥmad Rażā it was the Holy Cities of Mecca and Medina. However, Aḥmad Rażā diverges from Shāh ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz's commemoration of the 'Blessed Death' of the Prophet, by specifically stating that the occasion is a joyous one, even though the Prophet also passed away in the same month, yet the scholars have preferred celebrating his birth instead.[231] Furthermore, this commemoration of the 'Blessed Death' does not seem to be a practice that was performed in Mecca at that

[228] Ingram, *Revival from Below*, 42, 86, 170.
[229] Sajjad, *For the Love of the Prophet*, 214.
[230] Aḥmad Rażā, *Fatāwā*, vol. 23, 561, 739.
[231] Aḥmad Rażā, *Fatāwā*, vol. 23, 739, 748; Aḥmad Rażā, *Fatāwā*, vol. 24, 514.

time. In Mecca, the *mawlid* was not only held throughout the year in homes but also specifically on the 11th and 12th of Rabīʿ al-Awwal a grand *mawlid* was held in the Masjid al-Ḥarām (The Holy Mosque in Mecca) which involved amongst other practices sermons on the Prophet, recitation of poetry and *mawlid* texts, feasts, illuminations and *dhikr*.[232] Furthermore, in the Islamic tradition, the word *dhikr* has multiple meanings depending upon the context in which it is being used. It could mean 'remembrance, reminder and invocation,'[233] or even a 'repetitive recitation of the Divine Name or other sacred utterance.'[234] Accordingly, Aḥmad Rażā considers the *mawlid* to be the *dhikr* of the Prophet, and the Prophet's *dhikr* being the *dhikr* of God, thus being permissible.[235] One of the reasons why he does not consider the *dhikr* of the Prophet being separate from the *dhikr* of God is because for him the Prophet is not separate from God, and that a matter (*muʿāmala*) relating to the Prophet is effectively relating to God.[236]

Furthermore, for him if a *mawlid* is not free from reprehensible and prohibited practices (perhaps such as those not found in his benchmark, that is the Hijaz) , then it is permissible to stop someone from attending it.[237] However, if someone declares one who practices the ritual as destined for hell, then for Aḥmad Rażā such a person himself is destined for hell.[238] While fixing of the Prophet's day of birth as 12th of Rabīʿ al-Awwal is permissible according to him, since it is a view that has been held by majority of the Muslims. So, even if the actual day of birth is the 8th or 9th of the

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[232] C. Snouck Hurgronje, *Mekka in the Latter Part of the 19th Century: Daily Life, Customs and Learning. The Moslims of the East-Indian Archipelago*, trans. J.H. Monahan (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2007), 54-57, 130
[233] Eric Geoffrey, *Introduction to Sufism: The Inner Path of Islam* (World Wisdom Inc., 2010), 162.
[234] Peter Samsel, *A Treasury of Sufi Wisdom: The Path of Unity* (World Wisdom Inc., 2015), 59.
[235] Aḥmad Rażā, *Fatāwā*, vol. 23, 753.
[236] Sanyal, *Devotional Islam and Politics in British India*, 154.
[237] Aḥmad Rażā, *Fatāwā*, vol. 23, 760.
[238] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 14 (Lahore: Rażā Foundation, 1998), 687.

month, there is nothing preventing one from celebrating it on the 12th of the month.[239] Furthermore, there is no harm in fixing a date, provided that it does not make something non-mandatory to be viewed as mandatory (*wājib*).[240]

Although he does not consider the ritual to be a requirement of faith, however, he does view its purpose, that is the love and veneration of the Prophet as a pillar of faith.[241] Since the *mawlid* is an expression of this love and veneration for the Prophet therefore it is permissible for him. And it is not just permissible (*mubāḥ*) but highly recommended (*āʿla mustaḥabb*) and a source of blessings and rewards.[242] Nevertheless, in response to a petition from the Assistant Secretary of the Ahl-i Ḥadīth association of Amritsar, one can clearly and succinctly see Aḥmad Rażā's main line of argument in support of the *mawlid*: it has not been explicitly deemed prohibited. According to him, there is no proof from the scriptures or the recognized books of *fiqh* that the *mawlid* should not be celebrated. Moreover, for him there is no clear scriptural support of organizing conferences, and setting up and running religious organizations, yet the Ahl-i Ḥadīth movement is still engaging in it.[243] Hence, by the same logic the *mawlid* should also be permissible. In another fatwa he refers to those who prevent people from actions that have not been specifically prohibited by the Qurʾan and hadith, as innovators themselves.[244]

Another aspect of the permissibility of the ritual for him is that, if the original (*aṣl*) ruling for something is of permissibility, then at an ontological level that ruling remains applicable. A ruling of prohibition or impermissibility applies only to the reprehensible matters that become associated with it. Thus, giving the example of

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[239] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 26, 427-28.
[240] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 23, 745.
[241] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 21, 150-51.
[242] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 24, 492; Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 26, 553; Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 29 (Lahore: Rażā Foundation, 2005), 98.
[243] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 29, 248-49.
[244] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 23, 745.

unauthentic and fabricated narrations being recited in *mawlid* gatherings in India, he states that this will not change the original ruling of permissibility.[245] Here we can see a stark difference of legalistic argumentation when compared to Shāh Muḥammad Ismāʿīl, who deemed such rituals no longer permissible due to the reprehensible practices associated with them.

Lastly, as per Aḥmad Rażā the Qurʾanic verses mentioned earlier, which he quotes in support of respecting the Prophet and celebrating and disclosing God's bounty, have a general applicability. They should not be restricted by time, such as to the first three centuries of Islam, or to certain acts and practices only.[246] Therefore, it might not be completely inaccurate to assume that for him the *mawlid* is a means or format of expressing the love and veneration for the Prophet, as opposed to being a ritual at par with other mandated rituals (such as daily prayers and fasting) in Islam. However, as we shall see shortly, this expression and veneration should be performed in a proper manner.

2.4.2 *Mawlid Reciter Requirements*

> "…it is said that there are two devils accompanying a woman, and seventy with a handsome beardless youth!"[247]

As is obvious from the above quote, for Aḥmad Rażā a clean-shaven or handsome beardless youth cannot be designated as a *mawlid* reciter. Referring to the *Radd al-Muḥtār*, he treats such men in the same category as women, and likewise women cannot be reciters in gatherings of men.[248] However, it is not just shaving the beard that is an issue for Aḥmad Rażā; men who have shortened their beards or 'raised

[245] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 24, 519.
[246] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 29, 251-52.
[247] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 23, 722.
[248] Aḥmad Rażā, 722-23, 733.

them up' (similar to the Sikhs) cannot be designated as *mawlid* reciters as well.[249] Furthermore, the reciters should not recite in a manner that makes it difficult to distinguish the *mawlid* recitation from conventional styles of singing; such as the way in which *ghazal* singers perform.[250] In addition to the above, neither should the reciter narrate false stories and fabricated narrations during the ritual, nor should they recite poetry that is not inline with the sharia'. In fact, someone who recites verses of poetry that can be considered as insulting towards Prophets and Angels, has actually uttered a statement of disbelief.[251] Furthermore, the events of Karbalā', even if they are based on 'authentic' narrations, should not be recited in a *mawlid* gathering, mainly because the latter is a gathering of joy and it is not appropriate to combine it with the mentioning of events of sorrow.[252] Also, the reciter should not intend to or deliberately make the attendees cry by narrating the events of Karbalā' in such a manner that triggers such emotions.[253]

Moreover, for him it is prohibited (*ḥarām*) to designate a Muslim who is a known 'sinner' as a reciter; such as one who does not pray, drinks wine, commits adultery and is clean-shaven. Since, according to Aḥmad Rażā the position of a *mawlid* reciter is one of respect and privilege and a known sinner should not be appointed to it.[254] However, this condition of an individual being viewed as a sinner should be based on facts and not just on lies, allegations and slander. Furthermore, it is better to try to correct the actions of such an individual softly and at a personal level, as opposed to publicly.[255] Consistent with his thought process of not allowing known sinners to positions of respect and privilege, Aḥmad Rażā also prohibits a

[249] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 22, 691.
[250] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 23, 733.
[251] Aḥmad Rażā, 723.
[252] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 24, 489; Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 23, 739, 752.
[253] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 24, 516-17.
[254] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 23, 735; Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 6, 606.
[255] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 23, 738.

Shiʿa, who he views as someone misguided, to be designated as a *mawlid* reciter in a gathering of Sunnis.[256] Moreover, someone who maintains social relations with individuals belonging to the Aḥmaddīyya movement, such as eating with them in their homes, and does not publicly repent from it, should not be designated as a *mawlid* reciter either.[257]

Aḥmad Rażā also deems it impermissible for a reciter to obtain any sort of compensation for a *mawlid* recital. This is because, they are performing an act of worship and it is *ḥarām* to obtain compensation for such deeds and if they were to receive compensation it would result in them losing out on the reward from God.[258] Moreover, if the reciter is invited to have food after the event and the food is deemed as a sort of compensation for him, then this is impermissible as well. If he partakes in such food, then this would be considered his reward for reciting the *mawlid*, and thus again lose out on the rewards from God. However, if the food or meal is a general invitation for everyone and not specifically for the reciter, and neither are they given a larger portion or some special food, then it is allowed for the reciter to participate in it.[259] Nevertheless, based on a review of a petition relating to a *mawlid* reciter being compensated for traveling expenses in relation to a *mawlid*, Aḥmad Rażā considers such reimbursement of expenses permissible.[260] However, in other fatwas the petitioners highlight a practice in Bengal whereby the *mawlid* reciters are compensated in some manner after the ritual. There is no prior agreement between the two parties on the time and compensation, but since it is a common practice, it is

[256] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 23, 758.
[257] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 21, 648.
[258] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 23, 605, 725-26; Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 9, 648; Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 19, 502.
[259] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 23, 663.
[260] The specific petition gets complicated with the fact that the reciter started the journey and then returned back due to some reasons, without the *mawlid* recital. Furthermore, he took a detour on the way to run an errand as well. In this situation how much of the travel money does he owe the organizers, is the crux of the petition, see: Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 19, 170.

expected. The fact that it is something the reciters expect at the end due to common practice, Aḥmad Rażā deems it impermissible as well. However, he appears to be sensitive to local considerations by presenting two scenarios in which it might be acceptable. First, the two parties specifically declare beforehand that neither the reciters will accept any compensation for the recital, nor the organizers will compensate them. Any voluntary compensation by the organizer at the end is permissible, since there was no expectation and no prior agreement specific to the recital. The second is, the organizers hire the reciters as labor for a fixed rate and time. They can then utilize them as whatever they deem fit, and thus the compensation is not tied to their *mawlid* recital.[261] On the surface, these solutions might appear to be a 'creative' technique employed by the Mufti to avoid the prohibition of compensation pertaining to *mawlid* recitals. However, they also highlight the real underlying issue for Aḥmad Rażā in situations where *mawlid* reciters are compensated, and that is; treating the *mawlid* recital specifically as a service or product that can be transacted and negotiated based on time and cost. And this too, when there is no greater need to do so.[262]

Tied in closely with the reciter requirements, is also the content that is supposed to be recited at *mawlid* gatherings; a topic we move on to next.

2.4.3 *Mawlid Content*

> "The 'junction of misguidance' is: 'setting up courts', 'cooking porridges' and 'fixing pathways' relating to matters above one's status."[263]

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[261] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 19, 486-88, 495-96.

[262] In the same fatwas he identifies certain activities for which compensation can be agreed beforehand such as the teaching of the Qurʾan and other religious subjects, and those associated with the imam (prayer leader) and the *ādhān* (call to prayer). These too, he states, have been deemed permissible by later scholars as desperate measures due to the conditions of the time (*ḥāl-i zamāna*) and whereby they were viewed as necessary for the protection of the religion and faith, see: Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 19, 486, 495.

[263] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 29, 592.

I have already discussed Aḥmad Rażā's considerations for the authenticity of the narrations and the manner in which they were recited during a *mawlid*. Especially his ruling of not combining the commemoration of the events of Karbalāʾ with the ritual. Here I will further analyze fatwas relating to certain narrations and verses of poetry that petitioners had requested his views on. While responding to a petition asking whether the following narration 'If you (Prophet) were not, I (God) would not have created the heavens', is a hadith *Qudsī*[264] or not; Aḥmad Rażā states another hadith whose chain of transmission is sound. However, since the meaning or gist of the content is similar, he argues that the scholars should not confuse the public by debating (during a *mawlid*) on the exact wording of the narrations.[265] In another fatwa while discussing different views mentioned by a petitioner, on how the Prophet is made from God's Light (*nūr*), Aḥmad Rażā presents a hadith in support of the Prophet being from God's *nūr*. However, he states that it is a matter we cannot comprehend without God or the Prophet explaining it to us and neither can the Prophet's *nūr* be a part of God's ontological essence since God is free from the characteristic that a part of His separates from Him and becomes a creation.[266] Apparently, this view associated with the Prophet was not only mentioned in *mawlid* texts that were read during the ritual (as in the case of the above petition), but were also being debated during the gathering. Aḥmad Rażā's concern for not involving the general public in complex discussions pertaining to the manner in which the Prophet is God's *nūr*, especially during the *mawlid* itself, comes to full force in another fatwa of his, whereby the petition relates to a debate between two individuals on whether the Prophet is made from God's ontological Light per se or from a light that is God's creation. Aḥmad Rażā explicitly deems such discussions as pointless and not

[264] A revelation from God but in the words of the Prophet, and thus not a part of the Qur'an.
[265] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 29, 114-15.
[266] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 30 (Lahore: Rażā Foundation, 2005), 661.

beneficial to ordinary Muslims.[267] Thus he wants to keep the ritual free from any sort of discussions that might cause the attendees to be confused or even misguided. In fact, the *mawlid*, according to him, should be a source of removal of confusions and misguidances.[268] Similarly, he is stern in his opposition to a narration recited during the ritual pertaining to Shaykh ʿAbd al-Qādir's purported miracles, and considers it blasphemous.[269] He also views certain verses of poetry as blasphemous and takes a stricter stance of not only prohibition but the reciters being guilty of disbelief as well.[270] Although he does appear to accept that at times there is room for interpreting poetic verses in a manner that removes the blasphemous aspect from it, but nevertheless, it is something the general public is not able to do effectively. Therefore, such poetry should be avoided, lest it becomes a source of misguidance or attendees start viewing the reciter as misguided.[271] Furthermore, the use of musical instruments in conjunction with poetry is also deemed prohibited. This is highlighted in a fatwa of his, which happens to overlap with the next section, whereby Aḥmad Rażā does not consider it permissible to spend on a *mawlid* gathering where the *qawwālī* (or the Sufi oriented *samāʿ*)[272] is performed.[273] This is because in his time, and even up until today the practice in the Indian subcontinent involves use of musical instruments.[274] For Aḥmad Rażā, the *mawlid* should be free from the use of any sort of musical

[267] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 29, 592.
[268] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 7 (Lahore: Rażā Foundation, 1994), 484.
[269] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 29, 630.
[270] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 15, 300, 302, 304, 309
[271] Aḥmad Rażā, 300.
[272] For the Sufi practice and ritual of *samāʿ*, see: J. During and R. Sellheim, s.v. "Samāʿ", in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ed. P. Bearman, et al., accessed 15 February 2020, http://dx.doi.org.eres.qnl.qa/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0992.
[273] Aḥmad Rażā, *Fatāwā*, vol. 23, 561.
[274] For a description and example of how the *qawwālī* is conducted in the Indian subcontinent, see: Regula Burckhardt Qureshi, *Sufi Music of India and Pakistan: Sound, Context and Meaning in Qawwali* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 1-5.

instruments.[275] Thus the *mawlid* gathering needs to be 'proper' in order for it to be permissible to spend on.

2.4.4 *Spending on the Mawlid*

> "Money should not be taken from a Hindu for this purpose [organizing a *mawlid*]. It is stated in a hadith: I have been prohibited from [taking] the froth of polytheists."[276]

Aḥmad Rażā does not endorse taking money from Hindus for organizing *mawlid* gatherings, however, in another fatwa while discussing issues pertaining to a group of people, who in appearance seem to be Hindus yet perform their marriages and funerals according to Muslim customs; he states that there is no sin in taking their money and using it for the *mawlid* and other noble activities. This allowance is subject to the condition that there is no absolute or reasonable assurance that their income was obtained through illegitimate means. Furthermore, he still states that it is better not to take money from them.[277] This apparent contradiction with the first ruling can be resolved to a certain extent by reviewing another fatwa of his, whereby he provides a solution to using Hindus' money towards the *mawlid*. In this fatwa, he suggests instead of asking the Hindu to donate directly for organizing the *mawlid*, the Hindu can handover the money to a Muslim, and in this manner the Muslim becomes the owner of these funds. The Muslim can then donate this towards organizing the *mawlid*.[278] Again, it might appear to be a creative solution to get around a ruling of prohibition, however, upon closer inspection of another fatwa, the underlying issue for Aḥmad Rażā becomes clearer. For him religious activities are a form of attaining nearness (*qurbat*) to God, and this closeness cannot be achieved by the help or

[275] Aḥmad Rażā, *Fatāwā*, vol. 21, 664.
[276] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 9, 650.
[277] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 14, 371.
[278] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 23, 738.

assistance of a Hindu, or any non-Muslim for that matter.[279] Therefore, if another Muslim becomes an intermediary between the non-Muslims and the actual Muslims responsible for organizing the *mawlid*, then this risk of not attaining proximity with God, can be avoided.

Furthermore, if a deceased person has made a will (according to the shariʿa for up to one-third of their assets) for spending it on the performance of regular *mawlid* gatherings, then according to Aḥmad Rażā this should be executed in the stated manner and should not be replaced with other charitable activities. This is because the specific benefit of Muslims being blessed with the remembrance of the Prophet will not be achieved through other initiatives. However, if the inheritors feel that there are more urgent and necessary needs where this money could be spent better, then they should undertake it under the guidance of scholars and individuals with integrity, and still try to continue the designated practice (*mawlid*) as well.[280] Moreover, if someone designates a certain portion of their assets as a trust (*waqf*) during their life with the condition that any profit from these will be used for conducting the *mawlids* of the Prophet and other religious personalities, then such a transaction is valid and permissible.[281] Furthermore, items that have been donated or dedicated to another *waqf* such as a mosque, cannot be used for any other purpose outside of the mosque, regardless if it is for a *mawlid* gathering or even for another mosque. The argument being that the one who donated the equipment (or if bought by income from the *waqf*) intended it to be for a specific purpose, which is: using it for and inside the mosque.[282] Similarly, money designated as zakat (mandatory alms) cannot be spent on feeding the attendees of a *mawlid* gathering, simply because they are a mix of individuals from

[279] Aḥmad Rażā, 724.
[280] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 25 (Lahore: Rażā Foundation, 2003), 651.
[281] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 16 (Lahore: Rażā Foundation, 1999), 129, 155-56, 254.
[282] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 16, 452-53.

different social strata and zakat can only be given to those in need of it. However, if the organizer can identify and distribute food specifically to those in need of zakat, then it can be considered towards fulfillment of the obligation.[283] Similarly, if someone decides to spend in the way of God a certain percentage of their profits from trading, then this is allowed to be spent on the *mawlid* in general that is, if it was not a vow. In the case of a vow, it can only be spent on a *mawlid* gathering in a similar manner to the zakat, that is on those in need of it.[284] Furthermore, similar to the ruling on zakat, someone who spends on a *mawlid*, the action will be considered from that person only; and not on behalf of their relatives. However, if the individual is responsible (financially) for their children and members of household, then they can present it (to God) on their behalf as well.[285]

Based on a review of these rulings, one can clearly see Aḥmad Rażā's concern for the funding on a *mawlid* to be not only proper (and at times restrictive), but should also not conflict with other rulings of the shariʿa pertaining to alms giving, inheritance and trusts. In addition to spending being proper, Aḥmad Rażā's fatwas also highlight the correct modalities of one of the key expenses of the ritual, that is food.

2.4.5 *Food and the Mawlid*

> "There is no doubt that the Hindus are generally polluted by extreme impurities, they urinate in their *dhotis* [long loincloth] …"[286]

The petition for the fatwa where Aḥmad Rażā states the above, inquires if it is permissible to buy sweets for a *mawlid* from Hindu bakers. To many in today's time, Aḥmad Rażā's above statement might appear quite problematic. However, if one was to closely examine the fatwa in which he states the above, his argumentation becomes

[283] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 10 (Lahore: Rażā Foundation, 1996), 256.
[284] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 13 (Lahore: Rażā Foundation, 1998), 595-96.
[285] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 20, 369.
[286] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 23, 116.

clearer. Although, part of his reasoning is based on a 'general observation' of the hygiene practices of Hindus of his time. However, he also mentions that in Hinduism cow dung and calf urine are not considered impure but are in fact viewed as purifiers, therefore why should one expect them to take the same level of precautions as a Muslim. Thus, for Aḥmad Rażā it is more of a clash of perspective, an object that is considered impure by one group, is viewed as not impure, or even a purifier in certain instances, by another group of people. Nevertheless, he goes on to state that in the shariʿa the general rule is that 'certainty is not removed by doubt,' and through his discussion, he appears to imply that a fatwa based on ease and avoidance of hardship would deem it permissible to purchase sweets from Hindu bakers. However, this ruling does not remain valid, if one was absolutely sure that the sweets had been contaminated by such impurities.[287] However, beyond the fatwa, from the point of view of *taqwā* (God consciousness or fear of God), and the fact that these sweets will be used for a blessed gathering such as the *mawlid*, Aḥmad Rażā recommends that these should not be purchased from a Hindu. Furthermore, he mentions that if Muslim bakers are available, then why should one favour a Hindu with their money? Here we see a reflection of his broader view of Hindus being polytheists and thus any sort of social interaction being impermissible with them.[288]

Moreover, Aḥmad Rażā does not consider distribution of sweets or food to be a requirement of the *mawlid*. Since the essence of the ritual for him is the 'blessed' mentioning of the Prophet. Similarly, it is not mandated that an attendee should take their share of sweets, unless there is a risk that the organizer might find it disrespectful towards them. Furthermore, the distribution of sweets does not have to be in equal

[287] Aḥmad Rażā, 116-17; this conclusion of his is also reflected in another fatwa on accepting food prepared by Hindus for distribution in a *mawlid*, see: Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 21, 664.
[288] As discussed in chapter one. This is not restricted just to the social domain. In another *mawlid* fatwa he is not willing to support any form of political alliance or understanding with Hindus, see: Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 21, 180.

proportion if it is a regional custom, such as the youth getting half of an adult's share; or generally if the recipients do not consider it insulting.[289] Based on this, it appears that the overall concern in the distribution of food for Aḥmad Rażā is that neither the recipients nor the distributors should feel upset after completion of the process. Thus, it is more of a concern for a 'fellow' Muslim rather than for the correct performance of the ritual itself, that prevails in these circumstances for Aḥmad Rażā. Nevertheless, he states that it is better that if any sweets are left over, these should still be distributed amongst relatives, neighbors, friends and the needy, since these were intended to be distributed in God's way in the first place.[290]

Regarding attending a *mawlid* gathering and partaking in food, Aḥmad Rażā has certain caveats. First, the gathering needs to be free from reprehensible acts (as discussed earlier) and second, it should not have been organized by a Shiʿi.[291] He deems the consumption of any food prepared by a Shiʿi that contains meat as forbidden (*ḥarām*), unless the animal was slaughtered, cooked and presented for consumption under the supervision of 'Muslims.'[292] Similarly, if an organizer slaughters chicken as an offering to a personality whose Islam is doubtful, then according to Aḥmad Rażā the *mawlid* reciter should abstain from eating at such a gathering as well. Nevertheless, he should still conduct the *mawlid* recital but use it as an opportunity to provide guidance to the organizer and the attendees regarding the prohibition of venerating such dubious individuals.[293] Here we clearly see Aḥmad Rażā acknowledging the authority enjoyed by the *mawlid* reciter and the opportunity they have to reform the behaviors of the attendees through the *mawlid*. Yet, at the

[289] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 23, 744.
[290] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 23, 745.
[291] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 23, 757.
[292] This is consistent with his broader approach of socially boycotting groups he considers disbelievers or not proper Muslims. I analyze this further in chapter three.
[293] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 20, 266.

same time the reciter should be cautious by not consuming tainted food and in the process, set an example for others to follow.

Another practice that seems to have taken place in these gatherings at the time was that at the conclusion of the ceremony, *īṣāl-i thawāb* was performed with certain chapters or verses from the Qurʾan were recited and then sweets were distributed. Regarding the permissibility of this practice, and whether reciting those specific Qurʾanic verses, that are generally associated with being recited in gatherings of sorrow,[294] Aḥmad Rażā dismisses the latter as an incorrect belief and having no basis. For him, any recitation of the Qurʾan can take place in a *mawlid* gathering; there is no restriction or prohibition on this.[295] However, in this particular fatwa, Aḥmad Rażā also presents in detail his arguments for presenting the rewards of the *mawlid* to the Prophet as a valid practice. His support for the practice as being legitimate comes solely from jurists such as Ibn Hajar al-Makkī (d. 1566) and Ibn ʿĀbidīn.[296]

For Aḥmad Rażā organizing a *mawlid* in fulfilment of a vow is permissible,[297] and it is also permissible for both the needy and the well-off to partake in the food offered at such a gathering.[298] Since, according to him, when someone makes a vow to organize a *mawlid*, it is generally intended and understood to be for the ritual itself and not specifically for distribution of food to the needy. Furthermore, food offered at a *mawlid* gathering is permissible for consumption by all, even the Hashemites,[299] since again the intention of the organizer is one of 'gifting' and not of charity (*ṣadaqa*).[300]

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294 In the petition these have been referred to as *panj āyat* (literally: five verses).
295 Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 23, 119.
296 Aḥmad Rażā, 121-124.
297 Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 13, 590.
298 Aḥmad Rażā, 584.
299 Someone belonging to the Prophet's clan.
300 Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 10, 313.

2.4.6 *Mawlid Organizer Requirements*

Some of the issues I have discussed so far overlap considerably with this category. Since an organizer would be expected to adhere to earlier mentioned requirements in order to ensure the *mawlid* is performed in the correct manner. For instance, the *mawlid* should be in line with how it was being conducted in the Hijaz and free from reprehensible actions. The organizer themselves should be proper Muslims and not belonging to groups Aḥmad Rażā had issues with. However, here I will discuss some specific fatwas that either I have not covered already under the previous categories or relate specifically to the organizer themselves. Such as in one fatwa, Aḥmad Rażā discourages someone from attending a *mawlid* organized by someone who does not observe the daily prayers.[301] However, this is subject to the condition where the petitioner has already stopped social interaction with the organizer as a form of warning to them for not praying. If this is not the case, then they should still attend the *mawlid*.

Similarly, if a prostitute or a dancing girl, was to arrange a *mawlid*, and they assure that the food or sweets to be distributed in the ceremony is from legitimate sources and not from their income of adultery, and singing and dancing, then it is permissible to partake in it.[302] Furthermore, according to Aḥmad Rażā this is generally the practice of individuals involved in such occupations in his time, that is they organize religious gatherings through legitimate means of income rather than from their regular sources. In fact, for him, if such an individual takes a loan and then organizes the gathering, and intends to pay back through their illegitimate income, then it is still permissible to partake in the food. This is consistent with his approach discussed earlier, whereby one person's income (assuming from legitimate sources)

[301] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 23, 737.
[302] Aḥmad Rażā, 751.

becomes an intermediary between the illegitimate source and the *mawlid*. Therefore, the risk of not attaining proximity with God can be avoided. Nevertheless, after all this discussion, Aḥmad Rażā still uses *taqwā* to suggest that it is best to avoid participating in *mawlids* organized by such individuals. This is because, not only are the items in their house likely from illegitimate sources, but there is also a risk of the participant being slandered for visiting the house of such an individual. Furthermore, for him only a stupid person would trust their self (*nafs*) and consider themselves safe from the devil, and thus, by interacting with prostitutes and dancing girls there is the risk that this might possibly lead to other vices.[303]

As would be obvious by now, for Aḥmad Rażā a *mawlid* gathering can only be organized through income that would be considered legitimate (*ḥalāl*). This is also highlighted in another fatwa, where an individual has a property that they have rented out to someone who uses it as a hotel. The hotel tenants serve alcohol and pork.[304] Aḥmad Rażā states that although the individual would be considered a sinner if they knowingly rented out their property for such purposes in an 'Islamic region.' However, the income itself is legitimate since it pertains to the rental of the property, and not to the activities that are being performed at the hotel. Therefore, it is permissible to organize a *mawlid* through such funds.[305]

However, the fact that the organizer has used income from illegitimate sources to fund the *mawlid*, needs to be known with certainty. Aḥmad Rażā states this specifically in another fatwa where just based on slander and gossip, people should not avoid participating in a *mawlid* gathering organized by someone.[306] Although the fatwa is very short, but this perhaps is based on his earlier mentioned rule; that

[303] Aḥmad Rażā, 752.
[304] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 19, 519.
[305] Aḥmad Rażā, 520-21.
[306] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 23, 756.

certainty is not removed by doubt. This rule is on full display in another fatwa, where an individual who is known to obtain his income from interest, but is also involved in legitimate trading activities. In such a scenario, Aḥmad Rażā considers it permissible to attend *mawlid* and other similar gatherings organized by the individual and also partake in the food offered since there is no certainty that the income used for these activities was from illegitimate sources.[307] However, consistent with his concern for reforming individuals, he recommends that it is better for the invitees to avoid honoring the organizer's invitation so that it acts as a warning to him to rectify his deeds.

2.4.7 *Mawlids, Mosques and Women*

According to Aḥmad Rażā, it is permissible to hold a *mawlid* gathering inside a mosque, subject to the recital being based on authentic narrations, poetry being in accordance with the shariʿa, and beardless youth not performing the recital. This is mainly because for him (as mentioned earlier) the *dhikr* of the Prophet is the *dhikr* of God. Accordingly, mosques are a place where the *dhikr* of God is held, and therefore it is permissible for the *mawlid* to be held there as well.[308] Furthermore, for Aḥmad Rażā, the *mawlid* reciter can sit on the minbar or pulpit, and perform the *mawlid* as well. This he supports through a hadith where the Prophet made his companion Ḥasān b. Thābit (d. 674) sit on the minbar and recite poetry honoring the Prophet.[309] However, he deems it prohibited and a reprehensible innovation (*bidʿa saiyyiʾah*) for the attendees to recite *mawlid* poetry, or perform the *qiyām* during an *ʿĪd* prayer

[307] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 21, 633-34.
[308] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 8, 123.
[309] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 23, 409-10.

sermon. This is because any sort of talk or prayer, even if it is *dhikr*, is impermissible during the imam's sermon.[310]

Moreover, Aḥmad Rażā considers it prohibited for women to visit mosques for prayers. However, if a *mawlid* gathering is being held inside a mosque, which is being conducted by a Sunni scholar with correct beliefs (*ṣaḥīḥ al-ʿaqīda*) and wherein the requirements of the veil and segregation from men is observed, and there is no risk of temptation (*fitna*), then it is permissible for women to attend such a gathering. Nevertheless, it appears that for him meeting all of the above-mentioned requirements is almost impossible in his day and age.[311] It is also not permissible for women to hold women only *mawlid* gatherings in their houses in such a manner that their voices can be heard outside by men who would be viewed as *nāmaḥram* (men with whom marriage is possible in Islam).[312] This is because for Aḥmad Rażā this can lead to temptations and vices, since 'A woman's voice is also a woman.'[313]

2.4.8 *Other Matters*

Aḥmad Rażā considers it a reprehensible act to delay the night prayers (*ʿishāʾ*) beyond midnight because of a *mawlid* gathering. He suggests to perform the prayer first and then conduct the *mawlid*.[314] On whether it is permissible to perform a *mawlid* recital in front of a funeral, Aḥmad Rażā deems it acceptable. Although, he does state that in the books of the Ḥanafī *fiqh* any sort of *dhikr* in a loud voice with a funeral is impermissible. However, he views this as a ruling that was specific to the time of these jurists when people's hearts were not occupied with worldly distractions during a funeral. In his day and age, people are discussing about worldly affairs, some are

[310] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 8, 600.
[311] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 22, 239.
[312] Aḥmad Rażā, 240, 242, 245.
[313] Aḥmad Rażā, 240.
[314] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 5 (Lahore: Rażā Foundation, 1993), 326.

even seen laughing and discussing politics. Under such circumstances, performing the *dhikr* of Allah and the Prophet is recommended, so that people's attention can be diverted to God and the Hereafter.[315] It might appear here that Aḥmad Rażā is disagreeing with earlier Ḥanafī jurists. However, this is not the case. In his support he brings forward rulings from a later Ḥanafī scholar, ʿAbd al-Ghanī ibn Ismaʿīl al-Nābalusī (d. 1731) who endorses such a *dhikr*.[316]

In addition to the permissibility of performing a *mawlid* recital with a funeral, Aḥmad Rażā considers it recommended to organize a *mawlid* on behalf of a deceased person. He believes that the deceased person will be pleased when the rewards of such a gathering are presented to them in their grave by the angels. Thus, in a way the whole ritual of the *mawlid* becomes a manifestation of the practice of the *īṣāl-i thawab.* The underlying argument for Aḥmad Rażā in this ruling is that it is a form of gift (*hadiyya*) from the living to the deceased.[317] He does not explain this further in this *mawlid* fatwa. However, in other fatwas relating specifically to the living presenting the rewards of their deeds to the deceased, he quotes a hadith from *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* where the Prophet said 'One who can benefit his Muslim brother, should do so'.[318] Basing on the reasoning that this hadith is not restrictive to those Muslims who are alive, and since there is no specific prohibition regarding this act (that is presenting rewards to the deceased), therefore it is permissible.[319] For his views, he provides further support from rulings by past jurists as well.[320]

Regarding decorations and illuminations for the *mawlid*, Aḥmad Rażā considers it permissible if these are not in excess and extravagant. In fact, he argues for the

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315 Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 9, 141-42.
316 Aḥmad Rażā, 143-46.
317 Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 9, 598.
318 Aḥmad Rażā, 595.
319 Aḥmad Rażā, 594, 607.
320 See his treatise on this specific issue where he quotes a number of previous scholars and their views regarding the *Fātiḥa*: Aḥmad Rażā, 570-93.

necessity of illumination, since it is needed to facilitate the attendees.[321] Thus, illumination for Aḥmad Rażā is a means to performing the ritual effectively, and therefore, both activities (decorations and illuminations) are considered praiseworthy.

However, in another petition inquiring about the permissibility of making pictures of the Prophet, *Burāq* and angels, and presenting these during a *mawlid* gathering, Aḥmad Rażā vehemently rejects the practice. According to him, the Prophet himself will be the first one to be upset with such an individual.[322] He bases his arguments primarily on the prohibition in the hadith literature for making pictures of ensouled beings.[323] Furthermore, he believes that respecting and venerating such pictures is an even greater cause of God's wrath, than the act of making them. Since, one of the main reasons why people during Prophet Noah's time had adopted idolatry was because through the deception of Satan, after the death of their righteous ones they had made images of them, which they then placed in their gatherings. Subsequently, later generations started worshipping these images.[324] Nevertheless, he deems it permissible to create a map or picture of the Prophet's tomb and of his footprint. He quotes the practice of a number of scholars who have created and kept such pictures with them. For him, the map of the Prophet's tomb is a practice followed by the Successors of the Companions, while making a picture of his footprint was undertaken by the successors of the Successors.[325] At first, his two contrasting views relating to images might appear contradictory. However, upon closer analysis they reveal a consistency of thought with his underlying logic of certainty. For him the prohibition of making pictures pertains to ensouled beings[326] and this is based on

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321 Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 23, 259.
322 Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 21, 426.
323 He quotes 27 hadiths in support of the prohibition, see: Aḥmad Rażā, 427-38.
324 Aḥmad Rażā, 433.
325 Aḥmad Rażā, 456.
326 Aḥmad Rażā, 439.

'clear and certain' proofs from the hadiths. On the other hand, there is no certain proof on the prohibition of making pictures of inanimate beings. Thus, in the absence of a clear proof of prohibition, permissibility prevails. In fact, making maps of the Prophet's tomb and pictures of his footprint, was a practice followed by the pious (*aṣlāf*) and therefore there is evidence available in support of it. Consequently, such maps and pictures can be presented during a *mawlid* gathering and should also be accorded due respect.

According to Aḥmad Rażā someone can be stopped from attending a *mawlid* gathering if there is a valid reason for doing so. He provides an example of such a reason, where one of the parents of an individual are ill and he is responsible for their care. In fact, if by going to the *mawlid*, his sick parents will be in discomfort, then for Aḥmad Rażā it is recommended (*mustaḥabb*) to stop such a person.[327] Regarding the issue of people dancing in ecstasy (also referred to as *wajd*) during a *mawlid* gathering, Aḥmad Rażā bases its permissibility on intention. If an individual has in reality, lost all control over himself, then there is no question of this being permissible. However, if someone acts like they are in *wajd* but they do so in order to resemble the ones who actually experience it, and they do so not for the sake of showing-off and praise, then this too is permissible. Nevertheless, there is still a risk that the performer might be afflicted by vanity in such a situation, and thus this 'acting in *wajd*' state should be performed in seclusion.[328]

2.5 Conclusion

As this chapter has shown, from the early 19th century scholars in British India were debating, and as a result defining the correct modalities of celebrating the birth of the Prophet. One could argue that Shāh ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Dihlawī's attempt to

[327] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 23, 176.
[328] Aḥmad Rażā, 746.

define the proper *mawlid* gathering perhaps opened up the 'floodgates' for later scholars to not only outline what they considered valid and invalid aspects of the ritual, but also its permissibility in general. Shāh Muḥammad Ismāʿīl's opinion of impermissibility, was wholeheartedly accepted and taken up by certain Deobandī scholars. Similar to this group of Deobandī scholars were the Ahl-i Ḥadīth, who considered the ritual impermissible. However, what distinguished the two was their reasoning. For the Deobandīs it was the fixing of a date, belief of the Prophet being present in the ceremony and similarity with Hindu rituals, that made the *mawlid* problematic.[329] While for the Ahl-i Ḥadīth, it was the ritual itself which according to them had no basis in the Qur'an and hadith.[330]

As presented in this chapter, through an analysis of Aḥmad Rażā's fatwas, he was a vehement supporter of the ritual. However, basing himself in Qur'an and hadith, *fiqh* texts and legal reasoning, he defended the celebration as a jurist and a scholar, as opposed to a Sufi shaykh. Nevertheless, consistent with his contemporaries and those prior to him, especially Shāh ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, proper performance of the ritual was also an area of concern for him. Another key observation from this chapter is that most of his opponents on the permissibility of the *mawlid* were either from the circle of scholars who were once associated with Shāh ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, or those influenced by his students. This is where Aḥmad Rażā seems to be at a variance from the others. Since his main source of influence was his father Naqī ʿAlī Khān, who was associated with a different circle of scholars,[331] those that were from the Farangī Maḥal trend. This trend was different from the one originated by Shāh Walī Allāh and his successors such as Shāh ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz. Whereas, Shāh Walī Allāh was more focused

[329] Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India;* 150.
[330] Metcalf, 280.
[331] Such as Faẓl-i Ḥaqq Khairābādī (d. 1861) and 'Abd al-Qādir Badāyūnī (d. 1901), see: Metcalf, 298; Sanyal, *Devotional Islam and Politics in British India*, 59.

on hadith-based scholarship, the Farangī Maḥal approach placed more emphasis on rationalist sciences such as logic, which they felt was necessary for the study of *fiqh*.[332]

Thus, this difference of scholarly approach and methodology was one of the reasons for disagreements relating to the ritual of the *mawlid* in 19th century British India.

[332] Francis Robinson, *The ʿUlama of Farangi Mahall and Islamic Culture in South Asia* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 2001), 46-53.

CHAPTER 3 – EXPERIENCE: *MAWLID* AND PROPHETOLOGY FOR AḤMAD AḤMAD RAŻĀ

3.1 Introduction

> The world gets its life from you,
> Because of you the world came into being,
> The real is bound to its shadow,
> Upon you be thousands of blessings.[333]

These verses are from an Urdu poem composed by Aḥmad Rażā in praise of the Prophet. The work is unique since it is a form of salutation on the Prophet whereby the last letter of the third verse in each stanza ends on a unique Arabic letter, and in the correct alphabetical sequence.[334] The complete poem captures the status of the Prophet for Aḥmad Rażā. Accordingly, the objective of this chapter is to analyze his writings specifically his *mawlid* fatwas with regards to his views on the ontological presence of the Prophet in the *mawlid* gatherings. In order to do so, I first highlight key aspects of his Prophetology since these will ultimately have a bearing on his views about the Prophet's presence in *mawlid* gatherings. I then examine a specific set of his *mawlid* fatwas; those pertaining to the 'Indian Wahhabis' (that is, the Ahl-i Ḥadīth and Deobandīs), and the nature and extent of relations with them. In a way, these fatwas are a consequence of his Prophetology, wherein one can see a convergence of Aḥmad Rażā's juristic reasoning with his heightened veneration of the Prophet resulting in those having alternative views being treated sternly. With this understanding, I then analyze his *mawlid* fatwas pertaining to the practice of the

[333] Sanyal, *Devotional Islam and Politics in British India*, 214.
[334] Aḥmad Rażā, *Ḥadāʾiq-i Bakhshish* (Karachi: Maktabah al-Madīnah, 2012), 264-281.

qiyām since as mentioned in chapter two, it was at times viewed as an expression of the Prophet being present in the *mawlid* gatherings. Towards the end, I then analyze his *mawlid* fatwas in order to present his views on Prophetic presence in such gatherings.

3.2 Aḥmad Rażā's Prophetology

3.2.1 *On the Prophet Being Nūr*

Aḥmad Rażā believes all creation to originate from the Prophet's light or ***nūr***, who in turn was created from God's *nūr*. This he happens to justify through hadiths and opinions of Sunni scholars and Sufis and is a concept that forms the foundation for his views on the Prophet's essence.[335] As was stated in chapter one, both ʿAbd al-Ḥaqq Muḥaddith al-Dihlawī and Shāh Walī Allāh al-Dihlawī held similar beliefs. This view of the Prophet being *nūr*, was not a new concept in Aḥmad Rażā's Prophetology, but is a view that can be traced back to earlier individuals, such as Ibn ʿAbbās (d. 687), Muqātil b. Sulaymān (d. 767) and the Sufi master Sahl b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Tustarī (d. 896).[336]

For Aḥmad Rażā, the Prophet being *nūr*, also had implications for his physical body. Already for him, the Prophet's physical characteristics were different from other human beings, such as his power of sight being the same regardless of which way he faces,[337] and his bodily excretions (*fużlāt-i sharīfa*) being pure, clean and scented,[338] and that his heart (*qalb*) being so enormous that it can encompass; the seven earths

335 Sanyal, *Devotional Islam and Politics in British India*, 216.
336 For an overview of this thought, see: Carl W. Ernst, "Muḥammad as the Pole of Existence," in *The Cambridge Companion to Muhammad*, ed. Jonathan E. Brockopp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 124-129; for a Sufi view, see: Gerhard Böwering, "The Light Verse: Qurʾānic Text and Sufi Interpretation", *Oriens* 36 (2001): 113–144; also see Schimmel who traces this view back to Muqātil: Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 214-216.
337 Muṣṭafā Rażā Khān, *Malfūẓāt*, 384.
338 Muṣṭafā Rażā Khān, 456-457.

and heavens, the Footstool (*kursī*) and the Throne (*ʿarsh*).[339] Although this latter characteristic can be interpreted to have a spiritual meaning since the word *qalb* has been used to refer to both the physical heart as well as to a hidden spiritual faculty.[340] However, in Aḥmad Rażā's work, and consistent with Sufi thought, it is actually a combination of the two.[341] At another place, while responding to a question regarding the nature of the *qalb*, he mentions that in essence it is not really the 'piece of flesh' in the chest but a hidden faculty (*laṭīfa-i ghaybiyya*) that resides inside this piece of flesh or the physiological heart.[342]

In support of his views regarding the Prophet's physical characteristics he again presents hadiths, and opinions of Sunni scholars and Sufis. Moreover, for Aḥmad Rażā since the Prophet is *nūr*, his physical body also displays this characteristic such as his face and body being illuminated and that light was shed on distant cities upon his birth. In addition, being a body of light there are certain properties the Prophet displayed, such as not having a shadow and that he was able to see in the dark.[343] All this is justified through hadiths and opinions of jurists and scholars. Although, in this context he does accept certain hadiths to be weak, however he argues that there is no substantive proof for an opposing view and therefore a position based on weak hadiths is better than one without any support from the hadith works.[344]

Furthermore, his views on the Prophet's death and his 'life after death' are also entwined with this concept of the Prophet's 'illumination' (*nūrāniyyat*), as is reflected clearly in another poem of his:

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339 Muṣtafā Rażā Khān, 509.
340 Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Deliverance from Error*, tr. Richard Joseph McCarthy (Fons Vitae, 1999), 311.
341 al-Ghazālī, 311; For an overview of al-Tirmidhī's view of the *qalb*, see: Alexander Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism: A Short History* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 109.
342 Muṣtafā Rażā Khān, 405.
343 Sanyal, *Devotional Islam and Politics in British India*, 262-263.
344 Sanyal, 263.

Death also comes to the Prophets,
But just like for a moment,
Then after that moment is their life,
Similar to the earlier [life] in bodily form,
Although everyone's spirit is alive,
However, their luminescent [made of *nūr*] body is also spiritual.[345]

He bases his view regarding the prophets' status after death being different from other human beings on hadiths that state that God has prohibited for the earth to consume the bodies of the prophets. Moreover, their life after death is not just spiritual but also physical in nature, and is similar to their worldly lives such as they eat and pray in their graves.[346] Again we see here a consistency of thought with both ʿAbd al-Ḥaqq and Shāh Walī Allāh. Furthermore, according to Aḥmad Rażā since the prophets are physically alive as well, this is one of the reasons why matters relating to the deceased are not applicable to them, such as there is no inheritance associated with their property and their wives cannot remarry. In fact, quoting the Mālikī scholar al-Zurqānī (d. 1688), he states that the 'pure wives' of the prophets are presented to them in their 'pure graves' and they spend their nights with them.[347] Thus, for Aḥmad Rażā the prophets only encounter death in fulfilment of God's command that 'Every soul will taste of death...', and then they are granted their 'real lives', which includes physical characteristics associated with this world (*ḥayāt-i ḥaqiqī ḥissī dunyavī*).[348]

Although he does not specifically state it, however another consequence of accepting the Prophet as a primordial light through which the creation originated, is that it then becomes very difficult to argue for his experience of death to be the same as others. Therefore, for him the Prophet is always *nūr* regardless of time and place, that is: prior to all creation; during his physical manifestation on earth; and after his death. It was also because of this that he never referred to the Prophet in the past tense

[345] Aḥmad Rażā, *Ḥadāʾiq-i Bakhshish*, 372.
[346] Muṣṭafā Rażā Khān, *Malfūẓāt*, 484, 504.
[347] Muṣṭafā Rażā Khān, 362.
[348] Muṣṭafā Rażā Khān, 484.

and viewed him as ***ḥāżir-o nāẓir*** ('present' and 'seeing').[349] In fact, in his Urdu translation of the Qurʾan titled *Kanz al-Imān*, he translates the word *shāhid* (witness) when used for the Prophet as '*ḥāżir-o nāẓir*'.[350] For him then, in order for the Prophet to be a true witness of matters, he has to be present in some manner and be able to observe these as well. Additionally, since the Prophet is *nūr* and 'alive' (***ḥayāt***) for Aḥmad Rażā, therefore he believes that the Prophet has the power to go anywhere he chooses to, whether spiritually, physically or both. This will be further analyzed under the discussion on the Prophet's presence at *mawlid* gatherings for Aḥmad Rażā.

3.2.2 *On the Prophet Being an Intercessor*

Another implication of the Prophet being that *nūr* through which the entire creation originated, is that he is then the intermediary through which God brought about all creation. Thus, his status as an intercessor was firmly established even before his physical manifestation. Furthermore, for Aḥmad Rażā the Prophet was also the reason why God brought His creation into existence, which further adds credence to this elevated view of him being the 'real' intercessor.[351] In fact he views God as the only real Existence and the rest 'shadows' of Him, while the Prophet as the only real Creation and the rest a reflection of him.[352] The Prophet being the real intercessor meant that only he reached God without an intercessor,[353] while everyone else needs him as an intercessor in order to approach God:

> "... no one can approach Allah without the Prophet's intermediacy. All have to approach the Prophet, for he alone can intercede for them with Allah ..."[354]

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[349] Sanyal, *Devotional Islam and Politics in British India*, 257.
[350] For an example of this, see: Aḥmad Rażā Khān and Sayyid Murādābādī, *Kanz al-Imān maʿ Tafsīr Khazāʾin al-ʿIrfān* (N.p: Maktabah al- Madīnah, 2013), 784.
[351] Sanyal, 262.
[352] Muṣṭafā Rażā Khān, *Malfūẓāt*, 252.
[353] Muṣṭafā Rażā Khān, 251.
[354] Sanyal, *Devotional Islam and Politics in British India,* 256.

Using an allegory of the full moon, he states that it obtains its brightness from the sun and passes it on to the world. No one has the power to obtain light directly from the sun on this night, and has no other alternative but to acquire it from the moon. Hence, the Prophet is this full moon, without who's intercession and intermediation no one can ever obtain any bounty and benefit.[355]

Due to this preeminent status of the Prophet as an intercessor for Aḥmad Rażā, he believed that even after the Prophet's death, it was still permissible to call upon him for intercession. Again, citing and deducing from hadiths, he built his argument on the Prophet having an intercessory role (***wasīla***) since the beginning of his Prophethood, which continues in the present as well and till the Day of Resurrection.[356] For him the beginning of Prophethood is when God created the Prophet's *nūr*, as opposed to the moment of his physical manifestation in this temporal world or the moment of the first Qurʾanic revelation, and that is why he is also the first Prophet.[357] He not only accepted the Prophet's 'greater intercession' (*shafāʿat*) on the Day of Resurrection for the forgiveness of sins, but also viewed him as an intermediary for the Muslims, during his life, for God's acceptance of their prayers. This intermediacy continues after his death and is not just restricted to matters of salvation in the Hereafter but is also extended to worldly needs. However, this view on the Prophet being an intercessor was not something new with Aḥmad Rażā. It is a belief that has been associated with various individuals in the past such as Ḥassān b. Thābit (d. 674) and certain poets and mystics such as Rūmī (d. 1273) and al-Būṣīrī (d. 1294).[358] Above all, for Aḥmad Rażā, a shaykh in the Qādiriyya fraternity, the founder of the order Shaykh ʿAbd al-Qādir, (as mentioned in chapter

[355] Muṣtafā Rażā Khān, *Malfūẓāt*, 519.
[356] Sanyal, *Devotional Islam and Politics in British India,* 256-57.
[357] Sanyal, *Ahmad Riza Khan Barelwi*, 98.
[358] Schimmel, *And Muhammad Is His Messenger*, 85-104.

one) also held similar beliefs about the Prophet being an intermediary with God, in the present lives of Muslims.[359] However, it is not just Shaykh ʿAbd al-Qādir's views on the Prophet's intercession which we see being reflected in Aḥmad Rażā's thought. As Malik (2018) has demonstrated that the founder of the Qādiriyya, also considered the Prophet to be not only the center for all creation but also its reason for existence, and the one and only source through which reality can be accessed.[360] While discussing the 'Reality of the Prophet' (*ḥaqīqa Muḥammadiyya*), Shaykh ʿAbd al-Qādir clearly states that:

> "God created all the spirits [or souls] in the divine realm in the best real form. He [Muḥammad] is the name of humankind in that realm, and he is the original home."[361]

Thus, Aḥmad Rażā's views appear to be perfectly in line with Shaykh ʿAbd al-Qādir's on the Prophet being the reason for God's creation and his intercessory role. However, this should not lead one to assume that Sufism had a strong impact on the development of Aḥmad Rażā's Prophetology. Regardless of the fact that Shaykh ʿAbd al-Qādir is viewed as the founder of the Qādiriyya fraternity and more so by Aḥmad Rażā as the *al-Ghawth al-Aẓam* (as discussed in chapter one), he was also an influential Ḥanbalī scholar of his time. Later in his life, he was not only the head of the Ḥanbalī madrasa in Baghdad, where he taught various subjects, but was also a mufti issuing fatwas according to both, Ḥanbalī and Shafiʿī *fiqh*.[362] As we have already seen (chapter two), Aḥmad Rażā himself appears to be more of a traditional scholar then a Sufi when presenting his arguments and sources. Thus, it is no surprise that for him, Shaykh ʿAbd al-Qādir is a more significant reference point in the domain

[359] Malik, *The Grey Falcon*, 202.
[360] Malik, 201.
[361] Malik, 201 n. 140.
[362] Malik, 92.

of Prophetology than other Sufi masters such as Ibn ʿArabī, who also presented intricate concepts relating to Prophetology.[363]

3.2.3 *On the Knowledge of the Prophet*

Another key aspect of Aḥmad Rażā's Prophetology is the level of knowledge the Prophet had. In his stand alone work on the Prophet's knowledge of the 'unseen' (***ilm al-ghayb***) titled *al-Daulat al-Makkiyya bi-ʾl-Māddah al-Ghaybiyya* (The Bounty of Mecca on that which is Hidden[364]), Aḥmad Rażā states:

> "…he [the Prophet] was aware of all 'sciences' [*ʿulūm*] of the past and future. These *ʿulūm* were such that they have no limit and cannot be quantified – no one other than him had mastery over these *ʿulūm*."[365]

However, he immediately clarifies that the Prophet's knowledge is not equal to God's knowledge. According to him if Prophet Adam's *ʿulūm*, the whole world's *ʿulūm* and those in the Protected Tablet[366] were gathered they would just be a droplet compared to the Prophet's 'ocean' of *ulūm*. Similarly, the Prophet's knowledge compared to God's ocean of unlimited knowledge is just a spray or handful of water.[367] At another place, he further elaborates that if all the *ʿulūm* that ever existed and those that will in the future, were to be gathered they can still not be compared to God's knowledge since it is an attempt to compare something that is limited to that which is infinite (that is God's knowledge).[368] Furthermore, according to Aḥmad Rażā, the Prophet's *ʿilm al-ghayb* extended not only to the end of the world, but to the events and proceedings of the Day of Resurrection, and heaven and hell. He reconciled the two

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363 Annemarie Schimmel, *Islam: An Introduction* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992), 115.
364 The title translation used is from Sanyal, see: Sanyal, *Devotional Islam and Politics in British India,* 256 n. 77.
365 Aḥmad Rażā Khān, *Al-Daulat Al-Makkiyya bi-ʾl-Māddah Al-Ghaybiyya* (Lahore: Maktabah Nabaviyya, 2001), 35.
366 The Protected Tablet (*al-Lawh. al-Maḥfūz*) is where all that will occur from the beginning to the end of Creation is written.
367 Aḥmad Rażā, 36.
368 Muṣtafā Rażā Khān, *Malfūẓāt*, 94.

set of Qurʾanic verses; that is those that support the Prophet had knowledge of the unseen, and those that deny it, by stating that God's knowledge is intrinsic to Him and in this no one has a share. However, God can gift some of His knowledge to whomever He wishes, and from His creation He blessed the Prophet with the most of such knowledge of the unseen. He further expanded this binary of 'intrinsic knowledge' and 'gifted knowledge' by highlighting their characteristics.[369] Moreover, he was in favor of the view that the Prophet was aware of the 'five things' that were generally understood to be known by God only. His main argument was that the Prophet's gifted knowledge gradually increased as the Qurʾan was revealed over his lifetime. Thus, when those verses that appear to deny the Prophet having knowledge of the unseen were originally revealed he was not aware of these matters, but later on God granted him this knowledge as well.[370] In fact in his translation of the Qurʾan (*Kanz al-Imān*), he translates the word *Nabī* (Prophet) to be 'a teller of *ghayb*'.[371] Therefore, for Aḥmad Rażā the Prophet's status as a *Nabī* implies that he is not only aware of the unseen but also informs others about it.

Consequently, the Prophet being *nūr* and 'alive', has implications for his knowledge after death as well. Due to this superior status of his knowledge, the Prophet is also aware of people's inner affairs (*bāṭin*), such that:

> "… every single thing that exists is… known to the Prophet: all that exists between the sky and the earth, from East to West, everything pertaining to people's selves, their states, their movements, their moments of rest. He knows the movement and glance of the eyelid, the fears and intentions of the heart, and whatever else exists."[372]

In Aḥmad Rażā's Prophetology all these attributes of the Prophet (that is *nūr*, *ḥāżir-o nāẓir, ḥayāt, wasīla* and *ilm al-ghayb)* have been bestowed upon him by God because

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[369] Sanyal, *Devotional Islam and Politics in British India*, 259-260.
[370] Sanyal, 261-262.
[371] For an example of this, see: Aḥmad Rażā Khān and Sayyid Murādābādī, *Kanz al-Imān maʿ Tafsīr Khazāʾin al-ʿIrfān*, 322.
[372] Sanyal, *Devotional Islam and Politics in British India*, 261.

of His love for the Prophet, and are therefore, in no way comparable or in competition with Him.[373] **Figure 3** highlights the dependencies and connectiveness of the various components in Aḥmad Rażā's Prophetology.

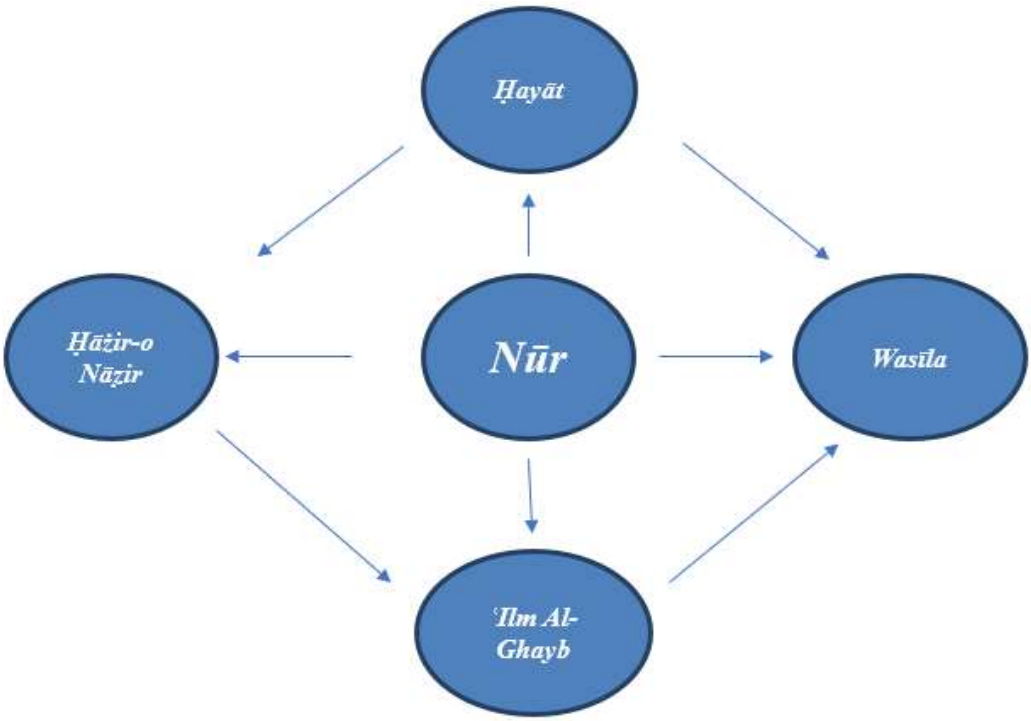

Figure 3. Components of Aḥmad Rażā's Prophetology and Their Dependencies

This conceptual framework of his Prophetology was a no-compromise area for Aḥmad Rażā. Any views of his contemporaries that seemed to differ from it, resulted in Aḥmad Rażā treating them as an insult to the Prophet or blasphemy. His treatment of such views in the context of the *mawlid* are analyzed in the following section.

3.3 Aḥmad Rażā and the Deniers of the *Mawlid*

After presenting Aḥmad Rażā's Prophetology, in this section I review his opinions regarding those who deny the *mawlid*'s permissibility. The driving force for Aḥmad Rażā behind this subset of the *mawlid* fatwas is not simply the permissibility of the ritual but also his broader Prophetology. Prior to examining these fatwas, it is

[373] Sanyal, 262, 263.

pertinent to understand the chronological development of Aḥmad Rażā's fatwas against the Indian Wahhabis in general. In 1896 he first issued a fatwa declaring all of the various trends prevalent in British India as being misguided and having 'bad' beliefs, which was later (1900) endorsed by 16 ʿulamāʾ of the Hijaz. In this fatwa, except for adherents of the Aligarh movement, none of the other trends were declared guilty of disbelief and neither were there any names of individuals mentioned. In 1906 he then issued a fatwa endorsed by the ʿulamāʾ of Hijaz titled *Ḥusām al-Ḥaramayn ʿalā Manḥar al-Kufr wa-l-Mayn* (The Sword of the *Haramayn* on the Throat of Disbelief and Falsehood), wherein he specifically declared certain scholars belonging to the Indian Wahhabi trend, guilty of disbelief.[374] Subsequent to 1906, and up until his death, the language of his fatwas appears to have become intense and forceful, for example an increased usage of terms such as blasphemers, apostates and disbelievers. The applicability of the fatwas also became broader, wherein even the followers of these scholars who viewed them as Muslims, were now being declared as disbelievers. This development is reflected in one of his fatwas issued in 1914:

> "… And the Wahhabis of [our] time, have progressed from *bidʿa* and misguidance, to the *miʿrāj* of *kufr*."[375]

What caused this 'evolution of disbelief' in Aḥmad Rażā's thought is beyond the scope of this study. However, this observation of a change in Aḥmad Rażā's views appears to be further substantiated by a review of the timeline of the specific *mawlid* fatwas pertaining to this issue. Out of the 16 fatwas dealing with the deniers of the permissibility of the *mawlid* and the extent of relations with them, 14 of these were issued subsequent to the *Ḥusām*. In these 14 fatwas the Indian Wahhabis have been

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374 Sanyal, *Ahmad Riza Khan Barelwi*, 108.

375 Although *miʿrāj* is generally used in reference to the Prophet's miraculous journey to the heavens. However, here Aḥmad Rażā uses it in a metaphorical sense to indicate the 'extremity' of their beliefs, see: Aḥmad Rażā, *Fatāwā*, vol. 6, 549.

clearly stated as disbelievers, while in the two earlier fatwas, they are treated as misguided or guilty of transgression (*fisq*).

3.3.1 *Indian Wahhabis*

> "Viewing the *qiyām* of the blessed *mawlid* as a reprehensible innovation, and attendance at saints-days (*ʿurs*) as an excess, are signs of the Wahhabis. And the Wahhabis are not even Muslims, let alone Sunnis, since they openly blaspheme Allah and [His] Messenger."[376]

In the petitions to Aḥmad Rażā as well as his responses, it is at times very difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish between Wahhabis, Deobandīs and the Ahl-i Ḥadīth.[377] This is primarily because for him the Deobandīs and Ahl-i Ḥadīth were also a sub-category of the broader Wahhabi trend in India.[378] In his *Ḥusām* he classified certain scholars belonging to the different movements in sub-categories of Wahhabis such as Amthāliyya and Khawatimiyya (which included individuals like Muḥammad Qāsim Nanūtawī and Naẓīr Ḥussain), the Kadhābiyya (for example Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī) and Shayṭāniyya (Ashraf ʿAlī Thānvī).[379] For him the leader of the Indian Wahhabis was Shāh Muḥammad Ismāʿīl and since both the Deobandīs and Ahl-i Ḥadīth scholars revered him, he viewed them to be his followers and accordingly Wahhabis as well.

The *Ḥusām* and the arguments therein are frequently referred to in his *mawlid* fatwas pertaining to the Indian Wahhabis, and the extent of relationships possible with them. In one petition to Aḥmad Rażā, an individual who is a denier of the permissibility of the *qiyām* and considers it to be an innovation, is alleged by another individual (Bakr) to be a disbeliever since he is a follower (performs *taqlīd*) of the scholars from Deoband and Gangoh. Bakr also alleges that these scholars carry out

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376 Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 29, 238.
377 For an example of such a case, see: Aḥmad Rażā, *Fatāwā*, vol. 23, 104-05.
378 Sanyal, "Are Wahhabis Kafir?", 206.
379 Aḥmad Rażā Khān, *Hussam-Ul-Haramain*, trans. Bashir Ahmad (N.p: Alahazrat Network, n.d), 50, 51, 55.

blasphemy of the Prophet. Although in his response Aḥmad Rażā does not refer to the Deobandīs specifically, but does confirm Bakr's views that Zayd and his 'religion-fellows' (*hum maẓhab*) have left Islam.[380]

At another point, he states that in India the only group of people that is a denier of the *mawlid's* permissibility are the Wahhabis. Here he mentions specifically Shāh Muḥammad Ismāʿīl as the imam of the Wahhabis and deems it prohibited to pray behind them. Again, the crux of the issue for him is their alleged insulting views about the Prophet, and he provides an example where they say: Respect the Prophet as an elder brother, and nothing more. [381] In light of Aḥmad Rażā's heightened Prophetology, where the Prophet is the center of the universe and its reason of existence, ignoring such alternative views, let alone accepting them would have been very difficult for him.

In another petition, a fatwa issued by an individual who studied at the Deoband madrasa is shared with Aḥmad Rażā. The objective is to inquire from Aḥmad Rażā the ruling for appointing such an individual as the imam of a mosque and praying behind him.[382] Although the *Mawlvī* under question deems the *mawlid* to be permissible if it is free from reprehensible and prohibited practices, however he specifically calls out the *qiyām*, and standing up with the belief that the Prophet is present in the gathering erroneous.[383] Responding to this and other rulings in the fatwa, Aḥmad Rażā states that the *Mawlvī* has been 'very crafty'! Instead of these questions, according to Aḥmad Rażā he should have been probed regarding the writings of the scholars of Deoband and the ruling of the scholars of Ḥaramayn on these, as stated in the *Ḥusām.* If he disagrees with the scholars of Ḥaramayn and does not consider such individuals

[380] Aḥmad Rażā, *Fatāwā*, vol. 23, 105.
[381] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 29, 204-05.
[382] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 29, 212.
[383] Aḥmad Rażā, 206.

who abuse the Prophet as disbelievers, then he himself is not a Muslim.[384] Similarly, while discussing another case, whereby an individual performs the *qiyām* and attends *mawlid* gatherings but denies the permissibility of fixing a date for the event, Aḥmad Rażā presents the *Ḥusām* as a benchmark to assess if this person is a Muslim or not. For him, if they respond in the same manner as the scholars of Ḥaramayn regarding the writings of individuals mentioned in the *Ḥusām*, then they will be considered a Sunni; otherwise from amongst their scholars that is; disbelievers.[385] At another point, he categorically declares that anyone who considers the Deobandīs as Muslims or doubts their *kufr*, is himself a disbeliever. This is regardless of whether he (the Deobandī) attends *mawlid* gatherings and performs the *qiyām*.[386] For him it is not surprising that his opponents are deniers of the 'essence' (*nafs*) of the *mawlid*, since they are deniers of the essence of the Prophet.[387]

3.3.2 *Relations with Deniers of the Mawlid*

Aḥmad Rażā considers not only certain scholars of the Deobandīs and Ahl-i Ḥadīth as disbelievers, but also views their followers as disbelievers who after becoming aware of their scholars' statements of *kufr* still view them as Muslims. Under such circumstances, where there was frequent interaction taking place between Aḥmad Rażā's 'proper' Muslim community and the Indian Wahhabis, it is expected that he would have been petitioned on the nature and extent of such interaction. This is the next set of fatwas I would like to analyze in the context of the *mawlid*. A reminder before I review these fatwas: for Aḥmad Rażā only the Wahhabis were deniers of the permissibility of the *mawlid* in British India.

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[384] Aḥmad Rażā, 212-13.
[385] Aḥmad Rażā, 230-31.
[386] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 14, 386.
[387] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 15, 524-25.

Accordingly, a denier of the permissibility of the *mawlid*, and someone who viewed it as an innovation, was unfit to lead the prayers or act as an imam. Anyone who knowingly prays behind such an individual was a sinner and if they committed such an act unknowingly, then it was mandatory (*wājib*) for them to repeat their prayers.[388] Although in another fatwa he presents possible valid reasons for someone not attending a *mawlid* gathering, such as being occupied with other matters, the gathering not being a 'proper' one, or the individual (who is not a Wahhabi) does not consider the *qiyām* to be a valid practice. However, he goes on to state that in 'these lands' this trait of denying the permissibility of the *mawlid* is found in no one but the Wahhabis, and therefore prayers behind such an individual are invalid.[389] In a similar fatwa, using his preferred juristic basis of an act to be only impermissible if specifically declared so by the Qurʾan and hadith, he considers the Wahhabis to be guilty of 'ascribing partnership in Prophethood' (*shirk fī al-risālat*) by declaring the *qiyām* to be impermissible. This is because for him the Prophet has not declared it prohibited while the Wahhabis have, and thus prayers cannot be offered behind such individuals.[390] At another point, a petitioner enquires about the ruling of offering prayers behind Deobandī imams in a town where the overwhelming majority is Deobandī, even though the *mawlid* is also frequently held there. Aḥmad Rażā responds clearly that the one who celebrates the *mawlid* cannot be a Deobandī and therefore, the people of the town should be informed about the blasphemy committed by the Deobandī scholars. In the same fatwa, he states that no prayers can be performed behind a Deobandī, even the funeral prayers; and any prayers offered will remain invalid. Furthermore, the petitioner mentions that they are unable to leave town and if it is permissible for them to inquire regarding any urgent religious rulings

[388] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 6, 419, 580.
[389] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 6, 502.
[390] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 6, 549.

from Deobandī scholars. To this, Aḥmad Rażā asks a rhetorical question: what would one do in an 'abode of war' (*dār al-ḥarb*), where there are only Hindus? Will he be told to inquire about such religious rulings from a *pandit* (a Brahmin Hindu scholar)?[391] Similarly, he declares it impermissible for 'Muslims' to listen to any sermons from 'Wahhabis'.[392]

Moreover, not only does Aḥmad Rażā deem it impermissible to accept Indian Wahhabis as prayer imams or scholars in matters pertaining to religious rulings, he also considers it prohibited (*ḥarām*) to socialize with them.[393] Although he bases this on the Qurʾanic injunction to 'not sit' with the transgressors,[394] however this social boycott may have to do with the fact that Aḥmad Rażā views the Wahhabis as apostates (*murtaddīn*);[395] a category of disbelievers which has traditionally been treated in a strict manner by the jurists. Although the classical juristic position on apostasy in Islam has been the death penalty, however in the Ḥanafī *fiqh*, a period of imprisonment is recommended to allow the individual to recant.[396] Thus, in the absence of an authority that would enforce such rulings, Aḥmad Rażā opts for the available alternative which is that such individuals should be socially isolated. In fact, he suggests that if one had the power to do so, they should stop such individuals from entering the mosque.[397]

On the surface, it might appear that Aḥmad Rażā's encouragement of proper Muslims to stop any social and religious interaction with the Indian Wahhabis might have to do with the majority of Muslims in India sharing his views. Since in order for

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391 Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 6, 573-74.
392 Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 14, 684.
393 Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 6, 581; Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 8, 75.
394 Qurʾan 6:68.
395 Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 6, 587.
396 David F. Forte, "Apostasy and Blasphemy in Pakistan," *Connecticut Journal of International Law* 10, no. 1 (1994), 45, 47.
397 Aḥmad Rażā, *Fatāwā*, vol. 8, 75.

a social boycott to be successful, a large number of individuals would be needed. Unfortunately, as Sanyal (2005) has identified, there are no statistics on the number of followers for the various movements and trends prevalent in the early 20th century in British India and so it is difficult to assess the extent of their influence. Although, it has generally been assumed that the Barelwīs were dominant in the rural areas, while the other reformist movements more so in the cities; however, as Sanyal has observed, this is inconclusive as well.[398] Nevertheless, on a closer review of some of Aḥmad Rażā's fatwas, it appears that he was not much worried about the impact of such a boycott on his adversaries, rather he was more concerned with the proper behaviour that needed to be adopted towards blasphemers, apostates and disbelievers. For example, in his earlier mentioned fatwa regarding the whole town being Deobandī, he states that the Sunnis (proper perhaps) should arrange for separate prayer congregations, even if it is just two individuals for daily prayers and at least four for the Friday and *ʿĪd* congregations.[399] Similarly, in another fatwa he suggests the petitioner to arrange a separate congregation in the same mosque where there is a designated imam who considers the *mawlid* to be an innovation.[400]

Thus, for Aḥmad Rażā, the denier of the permissibility of the *mawlid* is a Wahhabi and with whom any sort of interaction is impermissible. In the event, where an individual does not deny the permissibility of the ritual, but there are other indications that they could be a Wahhabi, they should then be queried and judged based on the writings of the Indian Wahhabi scholars.

[398] Sanyal, *Ahmad Riza Khan Barelwi*, 122-23.
[399] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 6, 573.
[400] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 6, 419.

3.4 The *Qiyām* and Aḥmad Rażā

> "The proof for [the permissibility of] the blessed gathering of *mawlid* and *qiyām* has been given a thousand times. In short, their proof is from the same [source] from where the proof for the Wahhabis disbelief has come [to us]. And Allah knows best."[401]

Perhaps not a 'thousand times' but surely at least in 10 fatwas, Aḥmad Rażā has attempted to provide 'proof' for the practice of the *qiyām*. Furthermore, the above-mentioned quote is his complete response to someone inquiring about the evidence (perhaps scriptural) for the *qiyām*. This fatwa was delivered towards the later years of his life and is extremely brief compared to his earliest fatwa on the same issue which turned into a lengthy treatise. In the earlier treatise (1881/82 C.E), Aḥmad Rażā addresses two issues relating to the practice: proving its permissibility through *fiqh* works, and challenging his contemporaries main argument that it was a practice not performed in the first three centuries of Islam (*qurūn-i thalāthah*).[402] Regarding the first issue, after quoting his main rule on permissibility, that is if it has not been deemed specifically prohibited then it is allowed, he presents the scholars opinions and practices in support of the *qiyām*. He also refers to the practice in the Hijaz, where the *qiyām* was performed under the supervision of the ʿulamāʾ. Quoting the hadith scholar al-Dimyāṭī[403] (d. 1306) he states that there is consensus (*ijmāʿ*) of the scholars on the practice being a recommended act.[404] Furthermore, he not only presents excerpts from fatwas of the permissibility of the practice issued by the ʿulamāʾ of the Hijaz but also claims to have one such fatwa in his custody as well. Moreover, quoting these later scholars, he states that only a hypocrite (*munāfiq*) would deny or prevent

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401 Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 29, 215.
402 Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 26, 497.
403 The Cairene hadith teacher of famous scholars such as al-Dhahabī (d.1348) and al-Subkī (d. 1355), for details see: Asma Sayeed, s.v. "ʿAbd al-Muʾmin al-Dimyāṭī", in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ed. Kate Fleet, et. al., accessed February 23, 2020, http://dx.doi.org.eres.qnl.qa/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_26035.
404 Aḥmad Rażā, *Fatāwā*, vol. 26, 508-09.

from such a practice, and that such an individual is an innovator destined for hell and one who should be punished (*taʿzīr*) by the ruler.[405] In fact, according to Aḥmad Rażā the absence of such a ruler, or authority in India that would have enforced Islamic rulings, has resulted in his opponents getting a lot of leeway in religious matters![406]

Regarding the second issue, that the practice was an innovation since it was not performed in the first three centuries of Islam, he considers the *qiyām* to be an expression of respect for the Prophet in accordance with a Qurʾanic injunction.[407] Since this command is not restricted to a certain time or constrained to particular actions, therefore its applicability is general except for instances where the shariʿa clearly declares certain acts as prohibited.[408] He also discusses the hadith of '*khayr al-qurūn qarnī*' which was used as a basis by his opponents for treating the first three centuries of Islam as a benchmark for assessing innovations. According to him, the hadith does not imply that any new act performed after these three centuries is to be treated as an innovation, but is in fact only an indication that as time goes by, misguidance will increase.[409] Furthermore, something that is good remains so, irrespective of the time period.[410] Moreover, if the Prophet or for that matter his Companions and their Successors, did not perform an action, according to Aḥmad Rażā this does not mean it is prohibited. Quoting Shāh ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Dihlawī he states: "Not doing [it] is something else, and stopping from doing [it] is something else."[411] The arguments he uses in this specific treatise are the ones that appear to be repeated across his subsequent fatwas pertaining to the *qiyām*.[412] For instance, he

[405] Aḥmad Rażā, 517-21.
[406] Aḥmad Rażā, 523.
[407] As per verse 48:09 mentioned in chapter 2.
[408] He gives examples of prostrating towards the Prophet and calling his name upon slaughtering an animal as specifically prohibited actions; see: Aḥmad Rażā, *Fatāwā*, vol. 26, 531-32.
[409] Aḥmad Rażā, 534.
[410] Aḥmad Rażā, 540.
[411] Aḥmad Rażā, 544.
[412] For examples, see: Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 23, 765-68; Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 29, 273-74.

states that an individual cannot be referred to as a scholar if he stops someone from performing the *qiyām*. Since according to Aḥmad Rażā, such an individual is not even aware of the requirement that a specific proof (from the Qurʾan or hadith) is needed for a ruling of prohibition.[413] While in other fatwas, he states that performing the *qiyām* is recommended (*mustaḥabb*), however, if everyone is standing then it is sunna, and if there is a risk of being viewed as a Wahhabi then it becomes mandatory (*wājib*).[414] Although his reasoning where it becomes *wājib* is clear since for Aḥmad Rażā Wahhabis are disbelievers and therefore in circumstances where it becomes imperative for an individual not to be viewed as a heretic or disbeliever, it is mandatory that they perform the *qiyām*. However, his reasoning for the circumstances under which it becomes a sunna does not appear to be quite clear. Unfortunately, he does not mention or explain this ruling in any of his other fatwas except the one under discussion here.[415] Nevertheless, it could have to do with a ruling by certain jurists that standing up in respect of someone is sunna and *mustaḥabb*. This is based on a hadith where the Prophet commanded his Companions to stand up for Saʿd b. Muʿādh.[416] Thus, it is possible that Aḥmad Rażā might have derived his ruling from this hadith whereby in a gathering if everyone stands up in respect, one should not remain sitting.

On the correct modalities of performing the *qiyām*, he states that the individual should stand as they would stand in front of the Prophet's grave, that is with their hands folded in the manner of the salat.[417] Additionally, the *qiyām* should be

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413 Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 292, 221.
414 Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 23, 730-32; Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 26, 553; Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 29, 267-68; Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 30, 128.
415 Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 26, 523.
416 For an example of such a ruling, see al-Nawawī's discussion of this specific hadith by Muslim: Abū al-Ḥusayn Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj and Abū Zakariyya Yaḥya Ibn al-Nawawī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim maʿ Mukhtaṣar Sharaḥ Nawwawī*, trans. Wahīd Al-Zamān (New Delhi: Al-Kitāb International, 2010), 43.
417 Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 26, 553; Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 30, 128.

undertaken at the time of the recital of the Prophet's birth, since it is a mention (*dhikr*) of his arrival in this world and thus deemed most appropriate to be performed at that specific moment.[418] However, does this imply that the Prophet has also physically arrived in the gathering? This is a question I attempt to answer next.

3.5 Prophetic Presence in *Mawlid* Gatherings

> With utmost respect (*adab*) O heart, enter the *mawlid* gathering,
> The reason [for the gathering] is himself present in the *mawlid* gathering.[419]

The above verses were quoted by a petitioner in his question to Aḥmad Rażā, on the possibility of the Prophet being present in a *mawlid* gathering. In his fatwa to the petitioner, Aḥmad Rażā started off with a quote from the Cairene jurist al-Suyūṭī (d. 1505) where he [al-Suyūṭī] claims that a number of righteous people (*ṣāliḥīn*) of his time informed him that they had seen the Prophet in gatherings of the *mawlid*, Qurʾan and hadith. He also quotes al-Zurqānī who stated that all the Prophets have the power to come out of their graves and go wherever they want to. Lastly, he also presents Ibn Ḥajar al-Makkī's (d. 1566) view that the Prophet's spirit manifests itself in seventy thousand forms or images (*ṣūra*).[420] He uses similar sources in another fatwa of his pertaining to the possibility of the Prophet's presence in a *mawlid* gathering.[421] While, in a different fatwa, he provides an opinion of a Ḥanbalī mufti, according to whom the Prophet's spirit is present in such gatherings.[422] In essence, he uses opinions of jurists mainly, as opposed to Sufis to support his view on the Prophet's spirit being present at such gatherings.

Furthermore, quoting the Andalusian jurist *Qāḍī* ʿIyyāḍ (d. 1149) eight centuries later, Aḥmad Rażā stated:

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[418] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 26, 523.
[419] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 29, 258.
[420] Aḥmad Rażā, 258-59.
[421] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 29, 282-83.
[422] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 26, 511.

> "The Prophet's blessed spirit is present in every Muslim's house."[423]

After presenting the above quote, he went on to state that:

> "… in the blessed gathering [of *mawlid*] he manifests himself specifically (*tajjalī-i khāṣṣ*). This is dependent upon his kindness and is not necessary at every place [of gathering] …"[424]

This manifestation could be a special spiritual one or both spiritual and physical. However, whether the Prophet is also present in bodily or physical form was something that according to Aḥmad Rażā no one could claim with certainty. This was something in his power (*ikhtiyār*) should he choose to do so, but it could not be claimed for every gathering.[425] Thus, the act of standing up (*qiyām*) at the end of a *mawlid* gathering was not meant to imply that the Prophet had physically arrived at that moment, but was only an expression of respect and veneration for him. The view that the Prophet was spiritually present in such gatherings but not necessarily physically is also an old one in the Islamic tradition and held by both Sufis and ordinary Muslims.[426] In fact, one of Aḥmad Rażā's contemporaries in British India, 'Ayn al-Quḍāt (d. 1925) believed and advocated the view that although the Prophet is not always physically present at the time of *qiyām*, however from the moment of his birth he has been 'arriving' in the physical world from the 'world of light', therefore he is eternally present. For 'Ayn al- Quḍāt, this aspect of the Prophet's presence was more significant than his physical one.[427] In a similar vein, while concluding his response to the verses mentioned at the beginning of this section, Aḥmad Rażā states that the Prophet does not arrive to a gathering because only someone who is absent arrives; while the Prophet on the other hand is already present in the homes of

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[423] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 29, 259.
[424] Aḥmad Rażā, 260.
[425] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 14, 667; Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 23, 750.
[426] Marion Holmes Katz, "The Prophet Muhammad in Ritual," in *The Cambridge Companion to Muhammad*, ed. Jonathan E. Brockopp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 153.
[427] Katz, *The Birth of the Prophet Muḥammad,*136-137.

Muslims.[428] **Figure 4** presents the different dimensions of the Prophet's ontological presence at a *mawlid* gathering for Aḥmad Rażā.

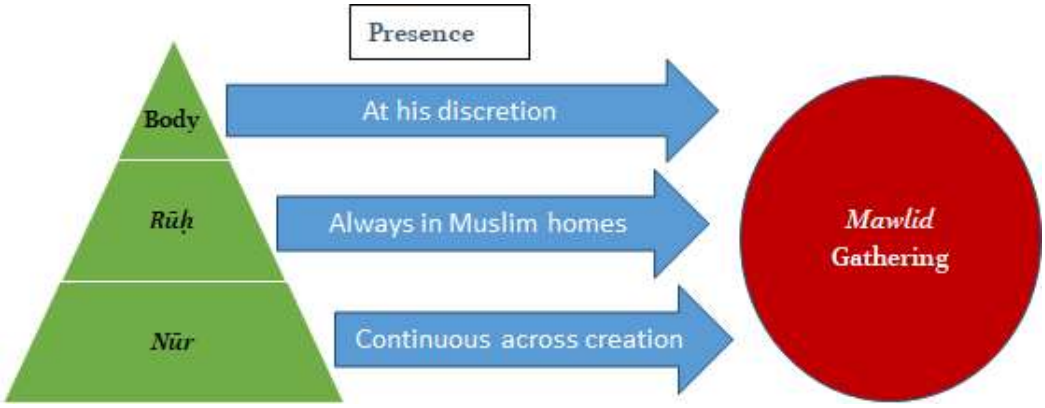

Figure 4. Prophet's Ontological Presence at *Mawlid* Gatherings

Consequently, for Aḥmad Rażā the question is not whether the Prophet is present or not in such gatherings, since for him the Prophet is present. The real question is whether in such gatherings can he 'manifest' himself to the attendees? To this, he responds in the affirmative.

3.6 Conclusion

> You are alive by God, you are alive - by God!
> O the one who is hidden from my external vision![429]

This chapter has presented the complex Prophetology of Aḥmad Rażā and shown that for him the Prophet is a primordial light through which and for whom all creation was created, he is therefore 'alive' and has knowledge of all existence. Because he is light, he is transcending across creation and is therefore, present and seeing in the lives of his followers, which also results in him being knowledgeable of all affairs. This knowledge of his followers' affairs, and the fact that he is 'alive' makes him the ideal candidate for interceding on behalf of them to God. The fact that his followers are scattered around the world, he should either be able to move at his

[428] Aḥmad Rażā, vol. 29, 259.
[429] Aḥmad Rażā, *Ḥadāʾiq-i Bakhshish*, 158.

discretion (physically) or simply be present everywhere (spiritually or *nūr*). As a result of this elevated status of the Prophet for Aḥmad Rażā, any different conceptualizations that appeared to diminish this position, were considered synonymous with blasphemy. Furthermore, according to Aḥmad Rażā and as demonstrated through his *mawlid* fatwas, in British India only someone who would not accept the Prophet's elevated status would deny the permissibility of the *mawlid*. Moreover, he deems any interaction with such individuals as impermissible and accordingly favors a complete boycott of them.

Furthermore, this chapter has shown that for Aḥmad Rażā, the *qīyām* is not a reprehensible innovation but a recommended act. For him this act of standing up during a *mawlid*, is not because the Prophet has physically arrived in the gathering, but is an expression of respect for the mention of his birth. However, this does not imply that the Prophet is absent from such gatherings. According to Aḥmad Rażā the Prophet's spirit (*rūḥ*) is present in the homes of Muslims and he can make an appearance at a *mawlid* gathering, if he chooses to do so. This appearance can be spiritual or both spiritual and physical. Advocating for the Prophet's presence in such gatherings, appears to be a multi-purpose argument for Aḥmad Rażā. Firstly, it showcases the Prophet's unique status and his ability to travel wherever he wishes to. Secondly, it acts as an encouragement to organize and attend a proper *mawlid* so that an individual might gain access to the Prophet at such an event. Lastly, the Prophet's presence himself in a *mawlid*, is proof enough for its permissibility. This last argument of the Prophet's endorsement is explicitly mentioned in one of his reviews of a compilation of the beliefs of the Wahhabis and Deobandīs. In this short treatise he states that the ʿulamāʾ and 'pious ones' have seen the Prophet in their dreams;

extremely happy with this act (*mawlid*) and saying: "The one who rejoices me, I am pleased with him."[430]

[430] Aḥmad Rażā, *Fatāwā*, vol. 15, 523-24.

CONCLUSION

In 1921 when news of Aḥmad Rażā's death reached one of his adversaries, Ashrafʿ Alī Thānvī, he is supposed to have remarked:

> "…. the fatwas against some of our elders, or this nobody [Thānvī], were issued [by Aḥmad Rażā] by being overwhelmed and veiled in the love of the Messenger."[431]

Regardless of how accurate this statement is, the fact that it is frequently cited in Barelwī polemical works on Aḥmad Rażā, indicates that for his followers his scholarly output was a result and an expression of his intense love for the Prophet. As this study has shown Aḥmad Rażā not only held the Prophet at a very high station (both spiritual and physical) but deeply venerated him. However, his love for the Prophet cannot be termed as 'blind' or one which would make him let go of reason. The fact that he was trained in the *maʿqūlāt* tradition and engaged in juristic argumentation in defense of his Prophetology, provides support for the view that his love for the Prophet was the result of scholarly reasoning rather than simply a matter of emotions. Furthermore, being influenced by two scholarship trends (Farangī Maḥal and Shāh Walī Allāh) to varying degrees than his counterparts was perhaps one of the factors that resulted in a number of matters becoming contentious in 19th / 20th century British India. One of these matters, and the subject of this study, happened to be the *mawlid*.

As mentioned in chapter one, by Aḥmad Rażā's time, the *mawlid* had become 'Indianized', wherein certain practices performed were fused with those carried out by the Hindu population, and the ritual became quite pervasive in the society. Whereas

[431] Muḥammad Kashif Iqbāl, *Imām Aḥmad Rażā Khān Mukhālifīn kī Naẓar Mayṇ* (Karachi: Jamʿīat Ishʿāt Ahl-i Sunnat, 2000), 19.

for Aḥmad Rażā the *mawlid* was permissible subject to being performed in a correct manner, there was no clear consensus amongst his opponents. In the beginning of the 19th century, the basis of the disagreement was more related to the practices and the beliefs associated with the ritual, rather than the ritual itself, while towards the later part of the century, the ritual itself was deemed impermissible per se. One can easily see this lack of consensus present amongst the opinions of the early Deobandī scholars. As this research has demonstrated, one of Aḥmad Rażā's main argument in support of the ritual was that there was no specific command prohibiting it. Furthermore, according to him people's excesses associated with the ritual should be rectified rather than getting rid of the *mawlid* completely. Moreover, my study has confirmed that his juristic reasoning in support of the *mawlid* was overwhelmingly based on Scripture and *fiqh* sources, as opposed to Sufi texts. This is noteworthy given that he was not just a mufti but also a shaykh of the Qādiriyya fraternity.

For Aḥmad Rażā the *mawlid* is a *dhikr* of the Prophet, and the Prophet's *dhikr* is basically God's *dhikr*. Accordingly, one can clearly see his training in logic on display when he states that the love and veneration of the Prophet is a pillar of faith, and the *mawlid* is an expression of this love and veneration for the Prophet. Hence, if the original ruling for a matter is of permissibility, then that ruling remains applicable and should not be restricted by time or to certain acts and practices only. Thus, the Qurʾanic injunctions of respecting the Prophet and celebrating and disclosing God's bounty, have a general applicability, and the *mawlid* is a manifestation of this. Disagreements were therefore, bound to occur with adoption of such an approach that was in contrast to his opponents'. Furthermore, his *mawlid* fatwas need to be considered in relation to his Prophetology, wherein one can see a convergence of his juristic reasoning with his veneration of the Prophet resulting in those having

alternative views being treated harshly. In Aḥmad Rażā's Prophetology, the Prophet's attributes (*nūr*, *ḥāżir-o nāẓir, ḥayāt, wasīla* and *ʿilm al-ghayb)* have been bestowed upon him by God because of His love for the Prophet, and are therefore, in no way comparable or in competition with Him. Thus, this was a no-compromise area for Aḥmad Rażā, and any opposing views were treated as an insult to the Prophet. Therefore, the 'Indian Wahhabis' were viewed as apostates and disbelievers. For him the leader of this group was Shāh Muḥammad Ismāʿīl, who both the Deobandīs and Ahl-i Ḥadīth scholars revered. Moreover, for Aḥmad Rażā in India the only group of people that denied the *mawlid's* permissibility were the Wahhabis; this is because they denied the 'essence' of the Prophet.

In his Prophetology and specifically on the subject of the Prophet's ontological presence in the lives of Muslims, Aḥmad Rażā at times relies on hadiths that would be considered weak. Nevertheless, the underlying argument for him is that this is still preferred, compared to adopting an opposing view based on no substantive proof at all. Therefore, as I have shown in chapter three, according to Aḥmad Rażā the Prophet can manifest himself spiritually, or both spiritually and physically in a *mawlid* gathering. This was something in his power, but it cannot be claimed for every gathering. Nevertheless, for Aḥmad Rażā the Prophet is a constant presence in his followers' lives, and his manifestation in a *mawlid* is always a special one. Thus, Aḥmad Rażā advocated for Muslims to venerate the Prophet and establish a relationship with him due to his presence in their lives, so that ultimately, they may be able to follow him better.

From an analysis of Aḥmad Rażā's *mawlid* fatwas, I was able to confirm that there was a rapid increase in petitions and fatwas issued towards the later part of his life, a testament to his rising popularity. Furthermore, most of the petitions were being

received from the Urdu speaking population of the United Provinces in British India. Moreover, for scholars petitioning to Aḥmad Rażā, the concern was more pertaining to the proper performance of the ritual and the associated practices, as opposed to the permissibility of the *mawlid*. Accordingly, through this work I have outlined his normative definition of the ritual and associated practices. For Aḥmad Rażā, only if a *mawlid* gathering is in line with how it was performed in the Hijaz during his lifetime would it be considered a 'proper' one. And only if the gathering is a proper one, is it worthwhile to attend and spend money on it. However, as demonstrated, in Aḥmad Rażā's rulings there is not only a concern for the proper *mawlid*, but that it should also not conflict with other rulings of the shariʿa. Although in his fatwas there seems to be an encouragement to practice *taqwā* and caution in matters of uncertainty pertaining to certain *mawlid* related issues. Nevertheless, as a jurist he still bases himself mostly on the rule that 'certainty is not removed by doubt'.

Another feature of his fatwas is the concern for reform, which is not only evident through his support for *taqwā*, but also through him advocating for limiting any kind of interaction with 'bad' Muslims or groups he does not consider Muslims at all. This approach of limiting interaction with other groups in India, is consistent with his apolitical approach of not supporting any sort of arrangement with the Hindus against the British. Although Aḥmad Rażā considered British to be Christians and with whom social relations were allowed in Islam, however, Hindus were polytheists and oppressors who interfered in Muslim rituals. Accordingly, those Muslims who were collaborating with the Hindus and other groups Aḥmad Rażā viewed as not Muslims (such as followers of the Aligarh movement), were themselves deemed as 'bad' Muslims and with whom any sort of interaction was prohibited. Through this process, he defined the 'proper' Muslim community in British India, which he

referred to as the Ahl-i Sunnat waʾl-Jamāʿat, and after his demise came to be known as the Barelwī movement.

However, his legacy cannot be confined to a single movement. Although as highlighted in my analysis of his Prophetology, his views regarding the Prophet were not in any manner unique or novel. However, it was the manner in which he articulated his views and his forceful style of argumentation that made him a unique scholar whose influence extended across multiple domains (such as *fiqh*, Sufism, politics and even literature) in the lives of the Muslims of the subcontinent. To quote one such example: In 1929 when the Indian poet-philosopher Muhammad Iqbal (d. 1938) was presiding over a convention in his hometown of Sialkot, someone recited a *naʿat* composed by Aḥmad Rażā containing the following verse:

> *rażā-i khudā āur rażā-i muḥammad* (God's pleasure and Muhammad's pleasure)[432]

Given the poet that Iqbal was, when he proceeded to deliver his address, he could not resist but compose a stanza extempore in the same poetic meter:

> See this spectacle where the fires of Hell,
> are ignited by God and extinguished by Muhammad.
> Amazing it is that the highest level in Heaven,
> is created by God and settled by Muhammad.[433]

[432] Aḥmad Rażā, *Ḥadāʾiq-i Bakhshish*, 65.
[433] Rājā Rashīd Maḥmūd, *Iqbāl-o Aḥmad Riżā* (Lahore: Nadīm Publishers, 1977), 33.

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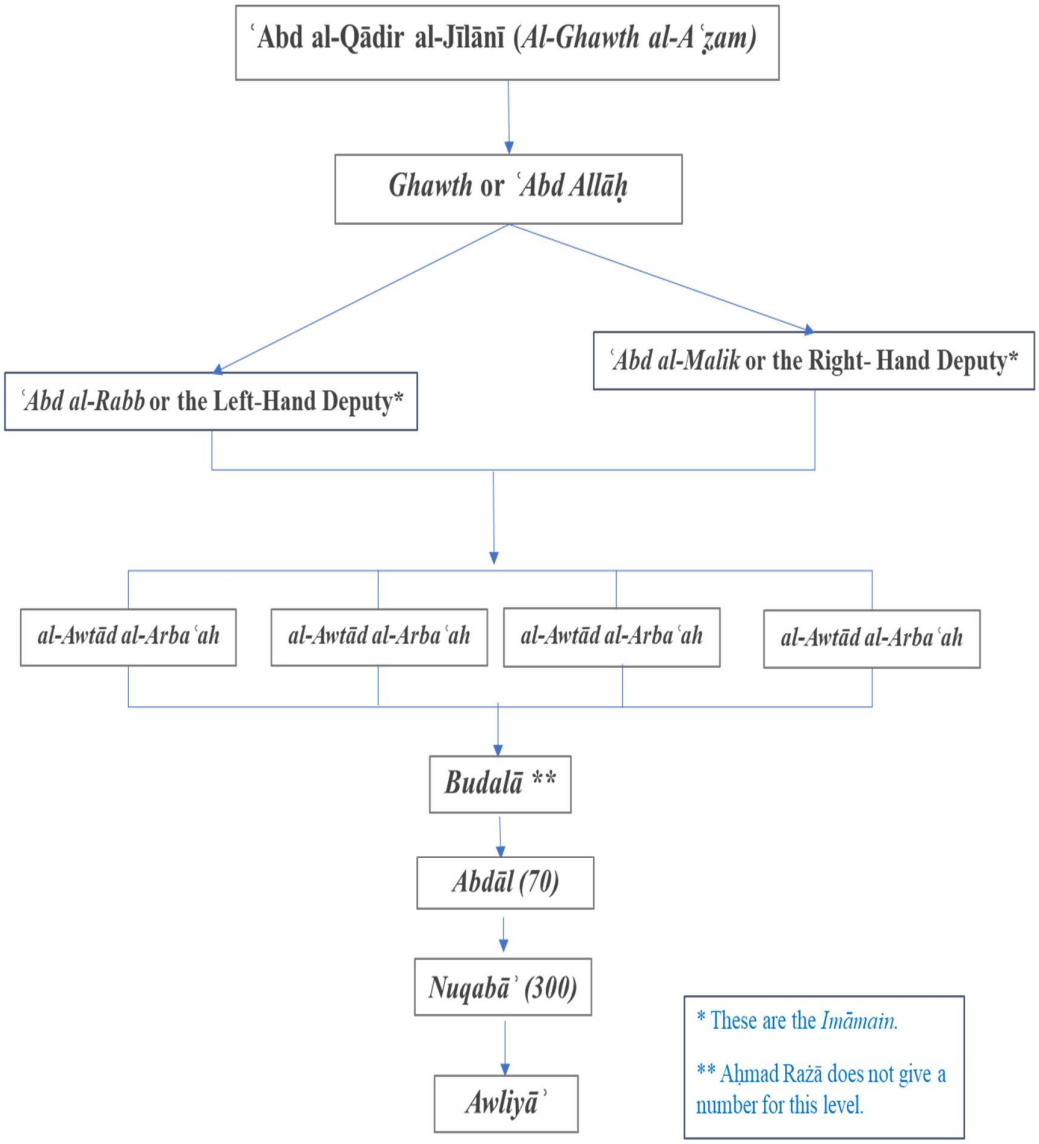
APPENDIX 1: AḤMAD RAŻĀ'S HIERARCHY OF *AWLIYA'*



Based on the details provided in the *Malfūẓāt*, see: Muḥammad Muṣṭafā Razā Khān, *Malfūẓāt-i Aʿlā Ḥażrat* (Karachi: Maktabah al- Madīnah, 2014), 178-180.

APPENDIX 2: SYNOPSIS OF AḤMAD RAŻĀ'S FATWAS PERTAINING TO THE *MAWLID*

#	Year (A.H.)	Month	Day	Main Category	Fatwa vs Treatise	Vol.	Pg.	Petitioner	Location	Broader Region[434]
1	1299	N.D[435]	N.D	*Qiyām*	Treatise	26	495	Public	Rampur	U.P[436]
2	1301	N.D	N.D	*Qiyām*	Fatwa	23	760	N.M[437]	N.M	N.M
3	1308	Ṣafar	21	Food	Fatwa	23	116	N.M	N.M	N.M
4	1309	Rabīʿ al-Awwal	27	Decorations and Illuminations	Fatwa	23	258	Public	Ujjain	Bombay Presidency
5	1311	Shaʿbān	22	Reciter Requirements	Fatwa	23	722	*Mawlid* Reciter	Amroha	U.P
6	1311	Shaʿbān	22	Content	Fatwa	24	514	*Mawlvī*	Amroha	U.P
7	1312	Rabīʿ al-Awwal	15	Food	Fatwa	23	118	Public	Pilibhit	U.P
8	1312	Rabīʿ al-Thānī	22	Wahhabis and Deobandīs	Fatwa	6	418	Public	Shahjahanpur	U.P
9	1313	Rabīʿ al-Thānī	27	Spending	Fatwa	23	723	Public	Nanital	U.P
10	1313	Shaʿbān	14	Content	Fatwa	30	660	*Mawlvī*	Moradabad	U.P
11	1314	Shawwāl	20	Content	Fatwa	7	483	Public	Jalandhar	Punjab
12	1315	Rajab	22	*Qiyām*	Fatwa	23	730	Public	Nanital	U.P
13	1315	Dhū al-Qaʿdah	26	Decorations and Illuminations	Treatise	21	425	*Mawlvī*	Rewan	U.P
14	1316	Muḥarram	18	*Qiyām*	Fatwa	23	731	Public	Kanpur	U.P
15	1316	Rabīʿ al-Awwal	16	Reciter Requirements	Fatwa	23	732	*Mawlvī*	Kanpur	U.P

[434] Based on the political divisions of British India in 1909, see: *The Imperial Gazetteer of India*, vol. XXVI Atlas (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1909), 20, 29-46.
[435] N.D – No date given
[436] U.P- United Provinces
[437] N.M – Not mentioned

#	Year (A.H.)	Month	Day	Main Category	Fatwa vs Treatise	Vol.	Pg.	Petitioner	Location	Broader Region[434]
16	1318	Jumādā al-Thāniyah	27	Reciter Requirements	Treatise	23	604	*Mawlvī*	Bengal	Bengal
17	1319	Jumādā al-Awwal	22	Wahhabis and Deobandīs	Fatwa	6	502	N.M	N.M	N.M
18	1320	Ṣafar	15	Permissibility	Fatwa	24	490	Public	Awadh	U.P
19	1320	Jumādā al-Thāniyah	29	Stopping from a *mawlid*	Fatwa	23	176	N.M	N.M	N.M
20	1321	Muḥarram	18	Reciter Requirements	Fatwa	23	734	N.M	N.M	N.M
21	1321	Muḥarram	N.D	Content	Fatwa	24	517	*Mawlvī*	Rampur	U.P
22	1321	Rabīʿ al-Thānī	19	Food	Fatwa	20	265	Public	Pilibhit	U.P
23	1321	Jumādā al-Awwal	18	Organizer Requirements	Fatwa	23	737	Public	Azamgarh	U.P
24	1322	Rabīʿ al-Thānī	6	Content	Fatwa	23	747	N.M	N.M	N.M
25	1322	Jumādā al-Thāniyah	2	Reciter Requirements	Fatwa	23	737	Public	Pilibhit	U.P
26	1322	Shaʿbān	29	Spending	Fatwa	23	738	Public	Azamgarh	U.P
27	1322	Dhū al-Ḥijjah	27	Permissibility	Fatwa	23	739	Public	Barelli	U.P
28	1324	Rajab	24	Spending	Fatwa	16	129	*Mawlvī*	Barelli	U.P
29	1326	Jumādā al-Awwal	12	Food	Fatwa	13	584	Public	Gwalior	Gwalior
30	1330	Jumādā al-Awwal	16	Food	Fatwa	10	312	Public	Hardoi	U.P
31	1330	Jumādā al-Awwal	19	Wahhabis and Deobandīs	Fatwa	5	391	*Mawlvī*	Bharuch	Bombay Presidency
32	1331	Rabīʿ al-Thānī	6	Food	Fatwa	23	744	Public	Pilibhit	U.P
33	1331	Jumādā al-Thāniyah	17	*Qiyām*	Fatwa	29	214	*Mawlvī*	Kanpur	U.P

#	Year (A.H.)	Month	Day	Main Category	Fatwa vs Treatise	Vol.	Pg.	Petitioner	Location	Broader Region[434]
34	1331	Ramaḍān	10	Prayers	Fatwa	5	326	Public	Jharkhand	Central Provinces
35	1331	Dhū al-Ḥijjah	20	Permissibility	Fatwa	23	745	Public	Bengal	Bengal
36	1332	Muḥarram	N.D	*Wajd* (Ecstatic display)	Fatwa	23	745	Public	Barelli	U.P
37	1332	Ṣafar	22	Wahhabis and Deobandīs	Fatwa	6	548	N.M	Pratapgarh	U.P
38	1332	Ṣafar	22	Spending	Fatwa	20	369	N.M	N.M	N.M
39	1332	Rabīʿ al-Awwal	10	Spending	Fatwa	23	561	Public	Barelli	U.P
40	1332	Jumādā al-Thāniyah	1	Reciter Requirements	Fatwa	21	648	N.M	N.M	N.M
41	1334	Muḥarram	7	Spending	Fatwa	10	255	Teacher	N.M	N.M
42	1334	Ṣafar	4	Spending	Fatwa	16	152	*Mawlvī*	Sitapur	U.P
43	1334	Ṣafar	12	Women	Fatwa	22	239	Imam	Marwar	Rajputana Agency
44	1334	Rabīʿ al-Thānī	10	Prophetic Presence	Fatwa	23	749	N.M	Mandalay	Burma
45	1334	Jumādā al-Awwal	12	Organizer Requirements	Fatwa	23	751	Public	Barelli	U.P
46	1334	Jumādā al-Awwal	12	Reciter Requirements	Fatwa	19	502	Public	Raebareli	U.P
47	1334	Jumādā al-Awwal	15	Women	Fatwa	22	240	Public	Jodhpur	Rajputana Agency
48	1334	Rajab	17	Content	Fatwa	29	629	N.M	Rampur	U.P
49	1335	Jumādā al-Awwal	27	Permissibility	Fatwa	23	753	*Mawlvī*	N.M	N.M
50	1335	Shaʿbān	7	Women	Fatwa	22	242	*Mawlvī*	Banaras	U.P
51	1335	Shaʿbān	23	Organizer Requirements	Fatwa	23	755	Public	Barelli	U.P
52	1335	Shaʿbān	26	Wahhabis and Deobandīs	Fatwa	29	230	Public	Barelli	U.P
53	1335	Dhū al-Qaʿdah	9	Stopping from a *mawlid*	Fatwa	21	178	*Mawlvī*	N.M	N.M
54	1336	Rabīʿ al-Awwal	19	Spending	Fatwa	16	450	Public	Rangoon	Burma

#	Year (A.H.)	Month	Day	Main Category	Fatwa vs Treatise	Vol.	Pg.	Petitioner	Location	Broader Region[434]
55	1336	Rabīʿ al-Thānī	18	Wahhabis and Deobandīs	Fatwa	6	572	N.M	Moradabad	U.P
56	1336	Rabīʿ al-Thānī	22	Reciter Requirements	Fatwa	21	662	N.M	N.M	N.M
57	1336	Rabīʿ al-Thānī	22	Reciter Requirements	Fatwa	21	663	N.M	N.M	N.M
58	1336	Rabīʿ al-Thānī	25	Spending	Fatwa	9	650	Public	Nanital	U.P
59	1336	Jumādā al-Awwal	1	Permissibility	*Fatwa*	29	97	*Mawlvī*	Moradabad	U.P
60	1336	Jumādā al-Awwal	12	Women	Fatwa	22	245	Public	Gwalior	Gwalior
61	1336	Jumādā al-Awwal	16	Relations with Deniers	Fatwa	29	204	Public	Barisal	Bengal
62	1336	Jumādā al-Awwal	21	Food	Fatwa	21	663	Public	Darbhanga	Bihar
63	1336	Jumādā al-Awwal	30	Relations with Deniers	Fatwa	29	205	Public	Fort Sandeman	Baluchistan
64	1336	Jumādā al-Thāniyah	15	Content	Fatwa	29	114	Public	Hooghly	Eastern Bengal and Assam
65	1337	Ṣafar	23	*Relations with Deniers*	Fatwa	29	237	N.M	Bihar	Bihar
66	1337	Rabīʿ al-Awwal	25	Relations with Deniers	Fatwa	14	683	Public	Bombay	Bombay Presidency
67	1337	Rabīʿ al-Awwal	27	Permissibility	Fatwa	29	247	Public	Amritsar	Punjab
68	1337	Rabīʿ al-Awwal	27	Relations with Deniers	Fatwa	6	578	Public	Meerut	U.P
69	1337	Rabīʿ al-Thānī	19	Spending	Fatwa	14	370	Public	Mewada	Bombay Presidency
70	1337	Jumādā al-Awwal	3	Permissibility	Fatwa	14	685	Public	Ambala	Punjab
71	1337	Jumādā al-Awwal	4	Relations with Deniers	Fatwa	8	74	Public	Ranchi	Central Provinces
72	1337	Jumādā al-Awwal	7	Content	Fatwa	15	299	Public	Rampur	U.P

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73	1337	Jumādā al-Awwal	7	Content	Fatwa	15	302	Public	Rampur	U.P
74	1337	Jumādā al-Awwal	8	Content	Fatwa	15	303	Public	Rajasthan	Rajputana Agency
75	1337	Jumādā al-Awwal	8	Organizer Requirements	Fatwa	19	519	Public	Lucknow	U.P
76	1337	Jumādā al-Awwal	14	Prophetic Presence	Fatwa	29	258	Public	Karnataka	Bombay Presidency
77	1337	Jumādā al-Thāniyah	15	*Qiyām*	Fatwa	29	267	Student	Barelli	U.P
78	1337	Ramaḍān	6	Content	Fatwa	15	305	Student	Barelli	U.P
79	1337	Ramaḍān	10	*Qiyām*	Fatwa	26	553	Imam	Not clear	N.M
80	1337	Ramaḍān	10	*Qiyām*	Fatwa	30	127	*Mawlvī*	Barrackpore	Bengal
81	1337	Ramaḍān	16	Prophetic Presence	Fatwa	29	282	*Mawlvī*	Gujrat	Bombay Presidency
82	1337	Shawwāl	11	Permissibility	Fatwa	26	553	Public	Bijnor	U.P
83	1338	Ṣafar	10	Mosques	Fatwa	8	600	Teacher	Aurangabad	Bombay Presidency
84	1338	Rabīʿ al-Awwal	1	Prophetic Presence	Fatwa	14	667	*Mawlvī*	Bharuch	Bombay Presidency
85	1338	Rabīʿ al-Awwal	19	Reciter Requirements	Fatwa	19	167	N.M	N.M	N.M
86	1338	Ramaḍān	12	Spending	Fatwa	25	648	Public	Bombay	Bombay Presidency
87	1338	Ramaḍān	14	Death and *Mawlids*	Fatwa	9	597	Public	Udaipur	Rajputana Agency
88	1338	Dhū al-Ḥijjah	8	*Relations with Deniers*	Fatwa	23	104	Public	Kahna	Punjab
89	1339	Muḥarram	18	Wahhabis and Deobandīs	Fatwa	14	386	Public	Barelli	U.P
90	1339	Muḥarram	20	Spending	Fatwa	16	253	Regular	Agra	U.P

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91	1339	Ṣafar	28	Reciter Requirements	Fatwa	22	691	Public	Barelli	U.P
92	1339	Rabīʿ al-Awwal	No date	Relations with Deniers	Fatwa	15	520	*Mawlvī*	Lahore	Punjab
93	1339	Rabīʿ al-Thānī	28	Reciter Requirements	Fatwa	9	648	Student	Barelli	U.P
94	1339	Jumādā al-Thāniyah	18	Content	Fatwa	15	309	Public	Dehli	Punjab
95	1339	Shaʿbān	9	Food	Fatwa	23	757	Public	Sondhi	U.P
96	1339	Shaʿbān	9	Reciter Requirements	Fatwa	23	758	Public	Azamgarh	U.P
97	1339	Ramaḍān	5	Mosques	Fatwa	8	123	Public	Punjab	Punjab
98	1339	Ramaḍān	7	Permissibility	Fatwa	26	427	Public	Firozpur	Punjab
99	1339	Ramaḍān	8	Wahhabis and Deobandīs	Fatwa	6	586	N.M	Pratapgarh	U.P
100	1339	Ramaḍān	23	Permissibility	Fatwa	23	759	Public	Gujrat	Bombay Presidency
101	1339	Ramaḍān	29	Mosques	Fatwa	23	409	Imam	Rajputana	Rajputana Agency
102	1339	Dhū al-Qaʿdah	5	Death and *Mawlids*	Fatwa	9	140	Public	Punjab	Punjab
103	N.D	Rabīʿ al-Awwal	2	Making a vow	Fatwa	13	590	Public	Raebareli	U.P
104	N.D	Rabīʿ al-Thānī	20	Spending	Fatwa	13	594	Public	Johri	U.P
105	N.D	Jumādā al-Thāniyah	18	Reciter Requirements	Fatwa	24	489	Public	Dehli	Punjab
106	N.D	N.D	N.D	Content	Fatwa	23	739	N.M	N.M	N.M
107	N.D	N.D	N.D	Permissibility	Fatwa	21	150	N.M	N.M	N.M
108	N.D	N.D	N.D	Organizer Requirements	Fatwa	21	633	N.M	N.M	N.M
109	N.D	N.D	N.D	Permissibility	Treatise	26	405	N.M	N.M	N.M
110	N.D	N.D	N.D	*Qiyām*	Fatwa	29	220	Public	Allahabad	U.P
111	N.D	N.D	N.D	Permissibility	Treatise	29	249	*Mawlvī*	N.M	N.M
112	N.D	N.D	N.D	*Qiyām*	Fatwa	29	273	N.M	N.M	N.M
113	N.D	N.D	N.D	Content	Fatwa	29	591	N.M	N.M	N.M

#	Year (A.H.)	Month	Day	Main Category	Fatwa vs Treatise	Vol.	Pg.	Petitioner	Location	Broader Region[434]
114	N.D	N.D	N.D	Reciter Requirements	Fatwa	6	605	Public	Not clear	N.M
115	N.D	N.D	N.D	Reciter Requirements	Fatwa	19	486	Public	Mymensingh	Eastern Bengal and Assam
116	N.D	N.D	N.D	Reciter Requirements	Fatwa	19	494	Public	Sandwip	Eastern Bengal and Assam

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